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Walden University

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Cathy Lee Hernandez

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Walden University

2020

Abstract

Principals' Behaviors and Practices in Closing Achievement Gaps of English Language

Learners

by

Cathy Lee Hernandez

MA, University of Texas Brownsville, 1999

BS, University of Texas Pan American, 1990

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Educational Administration and Leadership Administration

Walden University

November 2020

Abstract

Students in the United States who are English language learners (ELLs) are increasing in number, and they lag in academic performance in comparison to native English speakers. Educators and community members need to know more about how school personnel address closing the achievement gap as defined by local, state, and national assessments. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the behaviors and practices principals used to address the instruction of ELLs in their schools. The conceptual framework was based in Hallinger's model of instructional leadership with emphasis on instructional supervision and management. Data were collected during interviews with 10 principals from 4 school districts near the border with Mexico. Participants had at least 2 years as employees of their districts and experience as principals of schools with more than 10% ELLs. A combination of a priori and cycle coding was used to support thematic analysis. The key themes included leadership, development of teacher efficacy, accountability, and instructional supports. Principals emphasized creating a vision and mission and having high expectations for staff and for students. They reported that set practices, processes, and procedures must be used to support teachers and students and that it is critical to build relationships with staff, students, and parents. Strategies included additional time for lesson planning, data talks and walks, professional learning community time, and involving parents through activities. Preparation faculty and supervisors of principals need to focus on instructional leadership capacities to address the needs of ELLs. Positive social change includes elevating the students' skills and confidence to the point of allowing them to contribute to any community.

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Dedication

Completing my doctoral studies would not have been possible without the continuous support of my amazing husband, Juan Hernandez, and my four lovely children, Alfonso Hernandez, Melissa Hernandez, Adriana Hernandez, and finally my youngest son Dr. Juan Elias Hernandez. My nuclear family has given me unwavering support throughout this educational journey. Juan, my husband, provided me with impossible love and patience during my studies.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

English language learners (ELLs) are the fastest growing student population in American public schools (Estrella, Au, Jaeggi, & Collins, 2018). Since the inception of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, educators have put measures in place to help close student performance gaps on state assessments. With the reauthorization of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, changes made at federal and state levels provided monetary aid to school districts to implement evidence-based solutions to support struggling students. ESSA's additional recommendations in the development of a new accountability system focused on measuring results in the areas of reading, math, science, and social studies in various grade levels. The original Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, 1967) was voted into law to provide all students with an equitable education and to close achievements gaps of poor children. ESSA (2015) was signed into law, providing states with a turnaround of strategies from its predecessor, the NCLB Act (2001). As shown by standardized data from state tests, ELLs are not achieving as well as non-ELLs on their academic assessments. Carroll and Bailey (2016) noted that educators should make decisions on how to respond to the instructional needs of ELLs linguistically and academically. ESSA (2015), a new law that President Obama signed, passed Congress with the goal of providing equal opportunity for all students. According to Hamlin and Peterson (2018), there has been no evidence that ESSA (2015) has changed the academic achievement of diverse student populations. Another goal of ESSA was to change principals' roles and responsibilities to support and influence teacher instructional practices to raise ELLs' scores and close the achievement gaps

(Coady, Harper, & de Jong; Diaz, Cochran, & Karlin, 2016). Principals are responsible for the academic successes or failures of their students on state and federal assessments (Clark-Goff & Eslami, 2016; Gándara & Santibanez, 2016).

Researchers have estimated that 5 million ELLs have currently enrolled in elementary, middle, and high schools throughout the United States (Jiménez-Castellanos & García, 2017). To start closing achievement gaps, educators who work directly with ELLs can apply highly skilled, research-based, instructional practices (e.g., read-alouds, reading texts in small groups, and interactive vocabulary games) to meet ELLs' academic needs (Gándara & Santibanez, 2016). When educators worked with the ELL population, researchers indicated a direct correlation between teacher leadership and student achievement (Heritage, Walqui, & Linqianti, 2020). According to Mavrogordato and White (2019), school leaders have a critical role in ensuring that schools make the best decisions in meeting the academic needs of their students.

According to Boylan (2016), positive change is determined by the level of training and support principals and other academic leaders provide for ELLs or teachers within the school system. If principals lack professional development training on how to support teachers and ELLs, and continue using the same instructional practices, the achievement gaps may remain the same (Padron & Waxman, 2016). To offset the risk of this occurring, some instructional practices that aid in closing these gaps include teachers adapting the design of their instructional lessons. Teachers can structure the learning environment so that students feel supported, which will lead to the development of their academic skills (Ozdemir & Beceren, 2018). When principals scheduled collaboration

meetings and teachers shared instructional practices, academic achievement increased (Kitchen, Gray, & Jeurissen, 2016; Olsen & Huang, 2019). Salem (2016) studied principal actions and collaborations with teachers and found a direct correlation between these interactions and academic success and closing the achievement gap. When principals took the time to schedule collaboration time, teachers were able to share instructional practices for academic achievement (Kitchen et al., 2016; Olsen & Huang, 2019; Salem, 2016). With the goal of improving teacher instructional practices, a new teacher evaluation tool is being used.

Most school districts use a teacher evaluation system (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016). Through such evaluation systems, principals provide teachers with feedback during scheduled conferences (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016). Using evaluation systems helps principals work with teachers to focus on the needed areas of instructional delivery improvement. The systems provide opportunities for principals to give input and support to teachers to enhance their instructional capacity by developing annual goals of self-improvement.

According to Ruiz, Hooker, and Batalova (2015), states with the highest ELL population are California, Florida, Texas, New York, Illinois, Colorado, Washington, and North Carolina, with more than 100,000 ELL students enrolled in schools. Altogether, the western states accounted for more than two thirds of ELL students attending public schools in the United States (Ruiz et al., 2015). In the southern states bordering Mexico, the numbers have increased steadily, especially in cities and towns near Mexico. According to the data, the percentage of ELLs to non-ELLs in regions closest to

Mexico's border has increased 4 out of 5 years, nearly doubling the bordering states' percentages each year (Ruiz et al., 2015).

Background

ELLs are the fastest growing student population in American public schools, yet they perform lower academically than those of other populations (Estrella et al., 2018). According to Jiménez-Castellanos and García (2017), funding provides opportunities for preparing principals to work successfully with the ELL population. By participating in professional development, principals can increase their professional capacity concerning ELL students by attending institutes and joining organizations that directly address ELL students' achievement needs (Jiménez-Castellanos & García, 2017). Principals are a vital factor when setting the direction of the vision and mission of their campus, developing their staff, and designing the school to meet the needs of their students (Munguia, 2017). According to Padron and Waxman (2016), leaders need to engage with their staff regarding how to improve literacy and bridge the gaps between ELLs and non-ELLs. Principals at all levels might need to structure their school days to allow more time for instruction instead of time-consuming managerial tasks such as paperwork, emails, discipline, and meetings (Kouali, 2017; Terosky, 2016). Leading schools has become more challenging because principals' evaluation tools are developed from their ability to create and maintain an environment that supports academic achievement for all students (Kouali, 2017; Terosky, 2016). All principals are expected to manage their campuses with such tasks as campus inspections, fire drills, and building schedules. Nonetheless, principals might need to focus more on being instructional leaders and being more

collaborative with teachers (Davis & Boudreaux, 2019; Terosky, 2016). Principals are catalysts for school efficacy and for building better quality teaching to help close achievement gaps (Leaf & Odhiambo, 2017).

Baecher, Knoll, and Patti (2016) noted that, by building on their instructional capacity, principals might be able to provide constructive feedback and might allow teachers to reflect on their instructional practices. Then teachers could take corrective actions to enhance their instructional delivery methods by creating engaging lessons that focus on proven instructional strategies that could lead to closing the achievement gap of ELL students (Baecher et al., 2016). Baecher et al. (2016) argued that leaders nationwide should be concerned about how to provide feedback and how to support specialized instruction for ELLs. According to Lochmiller (2016), administrators' feedback is geared to pedagogy and not to content understanding. Lochmiller further argued that when principals provide feedback, it should come from their experiences as a classroom teacher and not from the teachers' expertise in the content area. The strategies are ways that principals might provide feedback that would increase student assessment results (Lochmiller, 2016).

Munguia (2017) indicated that principals at all levels should provide a system of support for teachers by offering workshops or other training with proven instructional strategies that yield higher academic results. Principals serve as the instructional leaders of their campus; consequently, they are responsible for sharing effective instructional strategies with teachers (Munguia, 2017). With these instructional strategies, teachers enhance their teaching abilities, and in the process, they become better prepared to help

their students (see Munguia, 2017). The gap that in practice that I address is understanding what principals think are the best practices in serving ELLs. The goal of closing the achievement gaps of ELL students is essential for all principals to support their staff to increase the academic achievement of ELLs (Munguia, 2017).

Problem Statement

There was a gap in practice regarding how principals use instructional leadership practices and behaviors to address ELL academic achievement gaps. Principals juggle responsibilities, and school management has evolved into spending more time on paperwork and less time on being an instructional leader (Terosky, 2016). The image of the principal as an instructional leader who is expected to oversee curriculum and instruction and to lead staff toward academic improvements has changed (Terosky, 2016). As Terosky (2016) noted, trying to satisfy both roles have led to a disproportionate emphasis on managerial work over the daily instructional focus.

Research supported the relationship between principals' leadership roles and their impact on teacher effectiveness in several ways. Principals provide professional development, allocate sufficient materials and resources, visit classrooms, and use data to drive curriculum and instruction (Castro Silva, Amante, & Morgado, 2017; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016). According to McCarley, Peters, and Decman (2016), principals care about the well-being and success of their students and staff. However, many principals across the United States have not been successful at closing ELLs' achievement gaps (McCarley et al., 2016). Although principals are held accountable for students' achievement, ELL students are trailing non-ELLS academically (Dutta &

Sahney, 2016). Several researchers have found that student achievement and closing achievement gaps is linked to principals' leadership styles and attitudes toward making a difference with ELL student success (Damanik & Aldridge, 2017; Dutta & Sahney, 2016; McCarley et al., 2016, Sağnak, Kuruöz, Polat, & Soylu, 2015).

When researching principals' roles in closing the achievement gap of ELLs or success of ELLs, I did not find published literature whose authors had explored these topics. The research that was related to principals' attitudes, roles, academic achievements (Yavuz, Cayirdag, Dahir, & Gümüşeli, 2017) and that pertained to special populations such as ELLs (Roberts & Guerra, 2017) exists, but is limited as defined by state and federal academic targets. Other research pertained to the views of faculty, staff, and principal leaders (Munir & Khalil, 2016). Researchers had also explored how leadership styles influence academic achievement (Abdallah & Forawi, 2017; Tan, 2018) and the influence of principal leadership on student achievement (Allen, Grigsby, & Peters, 2015), but not with ELLs. Findings from the current study might provide principals with helpful information about their roles in closing the achievement gaps of ELLs through best practices and behaviors.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the behaviors and practices that principals used to address the instruction of ELLs in their schools. The results of this study filled a gap in knowledge through better understanding of principals' practice. I interviewed two high school principals, four middle school principals, and four elementary principals to collect and analyze data on their behaviors and practices in

closing the achievement gaps of ELLs. The findings of this study might help principals understand and develop effective practices, processes, and behaviors to close the achievement gap of ELLs.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this qualitative study are as follow:

RQ1: How do principals describe their role in addressing the ELL achievement gap?

RQ2: How do principals describe the practices, processes, and procedures that they use to address improving ELL instruction?

Conceptual Framework

Hallinger's (2011) model of instructional leadership served as the conceptual framework for the study. Hallinger focused the model on instructional management by examining instructional leadership behaviors of principals. My framework followed Hallinger's empirical and theoretical analysis. It included describing a school's mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting positive school learning. Hallinger's model addresses instructional leadership and its effectiveness. With this framework, Hallinger emphasized managing instructional programs as the principal's role in promoting quality instruction and monitoring the progress of students.

Ghasabeh, Claudine, and Carmen (2015) emphasized that leaders should focus on attaining higher expectations from their staff by inspiring them to create novel resolutions. This would lead to a positive work environment. Transformational leadership is the leader's capacity to influence teachers not only to think about their individual

goals, but also to direct their drives to the greater good of the organization (Berkovich & Eyal, 2017). According to Berkovich and Eyal (2017), transformational leadership is linked with teacher motivation, commitment, and effort. Applying the leadership model helped me with all aspects of the present study concerning the role of principals in closing the achievement gaps of ELLs. I used the components of Hallinger's (2011) model and the transformational leadership framework to develop the research questions for the study. These frameworks were useful in identifying leadership behaviors of principals that influenced closing the achievement gaps of ELLs.

Nature of the Study

I conducted a basic qualitative study on principals' roles in closing the achievement gaps of ELLs through practices, behaviors, and processes within their leadership roles. Researchers found that principals' practices affect students' academic success and experiences that produce academic results in comparison with other subgroups (James, Butterfield, Jone, & Mokuria, 2017; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2016). According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), one purpose of qualitative research is to understand how individuals see their roles in their natural settings and how they make meaning through their daily experiences. Qualitative research is based on the premise of naturalistic engagement in design, data collection, and data analysis as the researcher engages, observes, and records experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Ravitch and Carl noted that qualitative researchers view participants as experts in their own experiences and use data from each participant's role to generate an understanding of its relationship to the phenomenon. The qualitative interview approach was appropriate in the current

study to explore how principals might raise the achievement of ELLs (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

This basic qualitative study contributed to the body of knowledge by identifying principals' behaviors and practices in addressing the instruction of ELLs in their schools. The data collection comprised one-on-one, Zoom, semistructured interviews. I conducted the interviews with 10 principals recruited through convenience sampling. I selected the participants from school districts that were close to the border of Mexico. I employed a priori codes from Hallinger's (2011) conceptual framework. After a priori coding, I organized the codes into categories. Once the data were gathered, coding and categorizing followed to identify themes. After coding and thematic processing, I emailed the findings to the participants for member checking.

Definitions

This section includes educational terms that I used in the study:

Achievement gap: The difference in educational outcomes between minority and nonminority (White, middle class) students is termed an achievement gap (Yeh, 2017).

Academic vocabulary: Words that are identified from academic texts and are related to a particular academic discipline form an academic vocabulary. Students are expected to understand and use the academic vocabulary to express concepts and ideas they learn (Huang, 2015).

English language learner: A student who speaks English as a second language and does not have enough proficiency in the English language to access academic content successfully is called an ELL (Gordon & Ronder, 2016).

Instructional coach: A leader who supports teachers and provides personalized professional development, job coaching, and work as a resource to help the teacher is called an instructional coach (Zugelder, 2019).

Instructional conversation: Conversation among students in small groups to facilitate dialogue and academic learning in classrooms is termed instructional conversation (Portes, González Canché, Boada, & Whatley, 2018).

Professional development: The acquisition of learning opportunities for personal and career advancement, educational quality, and alignment of expectations for student performance is advantageous because the student and school improvement go hand in hand with attaining essential goals in academic settings (Wang, Wang, Li, & Li, 2017).

Reflective feedback: A protocol used to assist teachers in reflecting on their lessons is called reflective feedback. Educators can use this feedback throughout the school year so that teachers can evaluate their classroom instructional practices and teaching experiences (Choy, Yim, & Tan, 2017).

Responsive leader: A leader who understands diversity, promotes inclusive practices, and builds connections with staff and students in his or her school is called a responsive leader (Gordon & Ronder, 2016).

Transformational leader: A leader who causes a change in a system by sustaining a shared vision and mission among the members is called a transformational leader (Bush, 2018; Makgato & Mudzanani, 2019; McCarley et al., 2016; Ninković & Knežević Florić, 2018).

Assumptions

I gathered information on principals whose practices and behaviors were related to closing the achievement gap of ELLs. An assumption was that the 10 participants would answer the questions honestly and without bias. Another assumption was that the participants did not know each other and would not meet to discuss the questions of the study. This was critical because the purpose of the study was to ascertain information using the participants' experiences and their roles as principals in closing ELLs' achievement gaps.

Scope and Delimitations

The problem was the gap in practice that was related to how the principals use instructional leadership practices and behaviors while trying to address ELLs' academic achievement gaps. This study was limited to four school districts that were close to the United States-Mexico border. I invited elementary, middle, and high school principals who had worked with ELLs to participate. I selected four elementary principals, four middle school principals, and two high school principals according to their years of experience and their leadership practices addressing ELLs' achievement gaps. These practices and behaviors were not inclusive of other populations, such as special education students. The focus on one student group constituted a delimitation. The findings might not be transferable to other groups (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore whether principals' behaviors had an instructional impact on closing the academic achievement gap for ELL students. The conceptual framework was Hallinger's (2011) model of instructional leadership.

Limitations

Although this study might benefit school principals, classroom teachers, and students, there were limitations. One limitation was the focus on four school districts near the Mexican border; it limited the number of participating principals. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) cautioned that a researcher might reveal bias by omitting data that defy the researcher's previous experiences. My role as a superintendent did not affect how I posed the questions to the participants. To mitigate researcher bias, all of the participants worked in various districts with varying positions from elementary to high school. Ravitch and Carl (2016) noted the importance of member checking with follow-up questions as part of the data analysis protocol. The findings were dependent on the principals' honesty regarding their behaviors in their roles in closing the achievement gaps of ELLs.

Significance

The results of this study might benefit school districts by increasing principals' understandings of their roles in improve the academic achievement of ELLs (see Wallace Foundation, 2013). By adding or making changes to their behaviors, principals might be better prepared to make instructional decisions to close the academic achievement gaps of ELL students. As the demands and pressures of state accountability standards and expectations rise, principals need to be more mindful of the leadership behaviors that address the academic needs of ELLs. There was limited research on the influence that principal leadership practices have on ELL academic achievement. My goal in conducting the research study was to contribute to the body of knowledge regarding

principals' roles as campus leaders and their influences on closing the achievement gaps of ELLs.

Social Change

This study was relevant to educational leaders for preparation and professional development. Principals' behaviors in closing the achievement gaps of ELLs, when using state assessments, provided the data to address the academic achievement of this student subpopulation. The results of this study might change the behaviors of practicing principals, thereby influencing them to address the academic performance of the ELL students through a different lens. Social change might occur if principals implement practices that lead to closing the achievement gap for ELL students under their leadership.

Summary

ELLs deserve the highest quality education. The purpose of this study was to explore the behaviors and practices that the principals used to address the instruction of ELLs in their schools. Previous researchers had indicated that school principals are a vital part of influencing students' academic progress through their leadership practices (Dolph, 2017; Hutton, 2018). Chapter 1 included the introduction, problem statement, research questions, conceptual framework, significance, assumptions, and limitations. In this chapter, I also provided the background that supported the research and the purpose statement. I provided the definitions of terms to clarify the meaning of terms used in this study. I also included the scope and limitations. In Chapter 2, I present a review of the

literature on transformational leadership and the effective behaviors and practices of school principals.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to explore the behaviors and practices that the principals used to address the instruction of ELLs in their schools. In this literature review, I addressed the findings of research related to the instruction of ELLs. I intended the critical analysis of the research to promote awareness of the relationship between school leaders and English language teachers in the region where the research took place.

ELLs are the fastest growing student population in American public schools (Estrella et al., 2018). However, the academic performance of ELL students is much lower than other populations (Estrella et al., 2018). Researchers need to understand how principals' behaviors influence support for ELL teachers and students and the ELL program.

Without significant changes, the problem of low academic achievement could persist as the ELL population continues to grow. Principals might need to address the problem to change this trend on their campuses. The ELL population has grown in many school districts across the United States (Estrella et al., 2018). In the current study, I addressed the behaviors of principals that are related to improving the academic performance of ELLs in their schools. Previous research indicated that principals have an essential role in influencing student academic progress through their leadership practices (Dolph, 2017; Hutton, 2018). The current study targeted principals who work with ELLs. The purpose was to add to the existing body of knowledge for school principals.

Literature Search Strategy

Principal leadership plays a critical role in the everyday operations of a school and affects student achievement through positive school culture and teacher practices (Park, Lee, & Cooc, 2019). As the leader of the campus, a principal is responsible not only for administrative tasks such as budgeting and resources, but also for the cultivation of teachers. The academic progress of all students, including students at risk who are also required to meet academic standards that high-stakes testing has established, is also their responsibility. As demands increase for rigorous academic accountability standards, principals are responsible for creating an educational environment that addresses the academic and social-emotional needs of all students. Despite the extensive research on principal leadership, there remain questions regarding the effectiveness of leadership styles (Van Vooren, 2018). The purpose of the current study was to explore the behaviors and practices that principals are using to address the instruction of ELLs in their schools. The research might help principals improve instructional practices that will promote academic achievement for all students. I conducted a systematic search of the literature using the Walden University library; the databases included ERIC, ProQuest, Sage Journals, and Google Scholar. The keywords that guided the literature search were roles and responsibilities of principals, principal leadership, leadership skills, and students' achievement of minorities, instructional practices of ELL teachers, closing achievement gaps, and instructional leadership. I employed additional strategies by reviewing abstracts, case studies, dissertations, articles, books, and publications from the last 5 years.

Conceptual Framework

I developed the conceptual framework for this qualitative study according to Hallinger's (2011) model of instructional leadership. The transformational model has three crucial functions. Function 1 is to outline a mission of managing the instructional program and stimulating a positive school climate (Hallinger, 2011). Function 2 is to foster a positive school culture where teachers want to take part in academic changes for all students' achievement (Hollingworth, Olsen, Asikin-Garmager, & Winn, 2018; Kester, 2018; Nemet, 2018). Function 3 is to monitor student progress through principals' visibility in classrooms and communities (Bruns, Costa, & Cunha, 2017; Garet et al., 2017; Kraft & Gilmour, 2016; Mireles-Rios & Becchio, 2018). Function 4 is principals' communication of goals, which is focused on organizational decisions and provides target goals in academics to help close achievement gaps (Hallinger & Walker, 2017).

Leadership theories have laid the foundation for 21st century principals to understand that they have a significant influence in closing achievement gaps (Harris, Jones, Cheak, Devadason, & Adams, 2017). Several studies that were conducted on how principals led campuses and supported teachers had positive effects on student achievement (Turkoglu & Cansoy, 2018). My purpose in conducting the current qualitative study was to explore the behaviors and practices principals use to address the instruction of ELLs in their schools. The research on principal behaviors and leadership practices to close achievement gaps of ELLs has been marginal. If these behaviors were valid, perhaps the academic achievement gaps of ELLs could be closed. I drafted the research questions for this study according to Hallinger's (2011) model of leadership.

Historical Information on English Language Learners

Culturally diverse classrooms across the United States are changing with an increase of students from different cultures and languages (Massey, Durand, & Pren, 2016). According to Gordon & Ronder (2016), educators who want to teach all students regardless of race cannot rely on the assumption that all students learn the same way. Schools are facing challenges in meeting the needs of ELL students who continue to have academic achievement gaps when compared to non-ELLs (Gordon & Ronder, 2016). Currently in the United States, ELLs constitute more than 10% of the student population in public schools (Heritage et al., 2020). Dell'Angelo, Madden, and Hudson (2017) conveyed that 5.3 million ELL students attended schools during 2013. Chiu et al. (2017) revealed an increase of ELL enrollment, which caused the states to initiate laws to oversee the educational needs of ELL students.

Education is afforded to all students in the United States, but not all students have access to quality education. Conchas (2001) noted that minorities living in poverty have not performed as well as White students. As Latinos continue to grow as a population (at 17% of the American population and 25% of births), educators ought to be significantly concerned with this population (Massey et al., 2016). With the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, discrimination through federally funded programs such as bilingual education was legally outlawed (Cisneros, 2009). During this period, Congress funded Title VII (also known as the Bilingual Education Act of 1968) through federal monies to address the educational needs of bilingual students. The programs funded by Title VII provided significant investment in language-minority students.

Under the NCLB (2001) Act and other accountability policies, schools were required to make adequate yearly progress in both reading and math for all subgroups. The results were to be publicly announced annually in the hope of holding schools accountable for raising student performance (Gonzalez, 2016; Master, Loeb, Whitney, & Wyckoff, 2016; Mitani, 2018). Under the NCLB (2001) Act, schools that missed adequate yearly progress for 2 consecutive years in the same subject area were to work on plans of action to address those areas through activities and providing the school of choice options and accompanying transportation needs (Gonzalez, 2016; Mitani, 2018). According to Mitani (2018), through NCLB (2001) Act sanctions principals would be required change their leadership behaviors to influence positively classroom instruction and student success in learning. The NCLB Act induced changes in work demands for principals, and increased job stress, occupational burnout, and turnover (Gonzalez, 2016; Mitani, 2018).

The NCLB (2001) Act ushered in an era of school accountability, state standards, and student standardized testing. However, minorities' achievement gaps persisted despite educational reform that was focused on eliminating these gaps (Fowler, 2016). The educational climate that the proponents of the NCLB (2001) Act fashioned caused the U.S. Congress to offer a reprieve known as Race to The Top Act of 2011, a grants reward program, that President Barack Obama signed into law. The plan granted billions of dollars to states whose applications were accepted to provide funding for creative educational programming (Pogrow, 2017). Despite these attempts, the federal government moved forward with another accountability system. The primary purpose of

the NCLB (2001) Act was to ensure that public schools leveled the playing field for underprivileged students (Shirvani, 2009).

Population Growth of ELLs

Schools across the United States have been serving more minority and low socioeconomic students than in the last 50 years (Duong, Badaly, Liu, Schwartz, & McCarty, 2016). According to Duong et al. (2016), concerns exist with an increase in minority students in schools, including ELLs. Duong et al. found that the demographics of American classrooms have changed, so have the achievement gaps. A growing number of non-native-born children are enrolling in schools across all grade levels, and many native students enrolled who are limited English proficient. The success of an individual is not determined by ability alone, but is influenced by academic efforts; therefore, schools must plan instructional practices and resources that will assist in the closing of the achievement gaps of ELLs (Master et al., 2016). Schools are tasked with exploring how students learn at home, what they bring with them to achieve in school (Yoo, 2016). Yoo (2016) found that the school systems have education behaviors and practices that are shared by the majority culture: those behaviors and practices often neglect the values of the minority communities they serve.

Minorities' achievement gaps are found in education in both public and private schools (Master et al., 2016). Evidence shows that these achievements gaps exist even before the students enroll in school (Olszewski-Kubilus, Steenbergen-Hu, Rosen, & Thomson, 2017). Olszewski-Kubilus (2017) claimed that assessments are a checklist for letter sounds, sight words, and informal assessments during circle time. Initial responses

to school reform that targeted the minorities' achievement gaps showed gains in narrowing the gaps; however, by the 1990s, any progress made was stalled and resulted in an increasing achievement gap (Baker, Farrie, & Sciarra, 2016). Bilingual education has had a history of being controversial in the areas of culture, language, education, and identity (Baker et al., 2016). Practical methods in education were implemented for minority students to have the necessary tools to become thriving members of society (Yoon, Hutchison, & Wisler, 2015). Yoon et al. (2015) found that schools demonstrated positive effects on student performance across student subgroups. Yoon et al. also claimed that, regarding the administration of the state test, students in these subgroups tended to fall behind their counterparts. Therefore, the achievement gap has been a growing concern facing public education (Yeh, 2017).

Closing the Academic Achievement Gaps of English Language Learners

To make educated decisions for all students, educational professionals and policymakers have endeavored to understand the stimulus behind the gaps in the state test of ELLs (Elliott, 2015). Saultz, White, McEachern, Fusareli, and Fusarelli (2018) stated that, with the reauthorization of ESSA (2015), teachers are the most crucial factor in student learning and growth in student achievement. The quality of teachers' effectiveness in instructional practices is determined at both the state and federal levels (Saultz et al., 2018). According to Kimbrel (2019), high-quality teachers and student achievement have been linked.

With the requirements from ESSA (2015), schools continue to be accountable in closing the academic achievement gaps of all students. Thus, a high number of minority

students remain in classrooms with teachers who were noncertified or with certified teachers who were ineffective according to the teacher evaluation instrument (Hansen-Thomas, Richins, Kakkar, & Okeyo, 2016; Saultz et al., 2018). Finally, through ESSA (2015) requirements, Congress allocated schools Title II funds to support student achievement. With the reauthorization of ESSA, teacher quality has a direct correlation in closing achievement gaps. Finally, teachers are the most critical factor in influencing student achievement (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; Saultz et al., 2018). Villegas, SaizdeLaMora, Martin, and Mills (2018) delivered information on the relationship between the academic achievement of all students and insufficient financing for English language learners. Villegas et al. claimed that the performance gap was occurring because of insufficient resources that were supplanting and not supporting targeted populations using federal and state funds. The funding, according to these researchers, had a limited impact on closing the achievement gaps over time.

Campus Administrator Roles

According to Fine and Lee (2017), culturally responsive leadership frequently overlaps with “leadership for social justice” styles, a term predominant in educational literature that is centered on refining the instructional practices and results for all students. For instance, Fine and Lee stated that it is becoming increasingly imperative for leaders to recognize the necessity to interact with diverse learners. Fine and Lee also noted that, when educational leaders begin to engage in mutual discussions about developing people and programs that address social justice, their educational leadership might be enhanced if they were to connect diversity and equity for all students.

According to Karadag, Bektas, Cogaltay, and Yalcin (2015), cultural responsiveness has become a focus as student populations become more diverse in the classrooms. The role of principals might have changed as demographics have changed. Karadag et al. presented information on the effectiveness of student achievement, correlating it with campus principals' leadership styles and their effect on student achievement. Principals who conveyed commitment and organizational citizenship behavior contributed to teacher satisfaction in their job. When teachers are satisfied and happy with their school leaders, it transfers to student academic achievement (see Karadag et al., 2015).

Gordan and Ronder (2016) offered that being culturally responsiveness in leadership roles is vital in today's world of diverse schools because of the academic needs of all students. Educators must learn about other culture biases to understand how their students learn best (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2018; Gordon & Ronder, 2016; Keehne, Sarsona, Kawakami, & Au, 2018). Likewise, by being a culturally responsive leader, school principals should understand what diversity is and, thus, promote inclusive practices in their schools, and build connections with staff and students. Equally important are the relationships between schools and their communities (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2018; Gordon & Ronder, 2016; Keehne et al., 2018).

Smith and Amushigamo (2016) offered information on how principals play a central role in maintaining the culture of learning for all students. According to Smith and Amushigamo, principal leadership engagement is a crucial component of positive learning experiences for students. When leaders have created a school culture of

belonging through care, trust, collaboration, and mutual respect, it leads to student achievement (Smith & Amushigamo, 2016). Smith and Amushigamo (2016) noted that being in a leadership position comes with the responsibility of being accountable for student progress. The implementation of cultural responsiveness is not applied and monitored thoroughly in schools, it can be fragmented and transitory (see Smith and Amushigamo, 2016). The roles and responsibilities of a leader are critical when the goal is that all students learn and be successful in their academic achievement (Smith & Amushigamo, 2016). Harris et al. (2017) noted that leadership is vital for improving schools and improving student performance on standardized testing. According to Hallinger and Murphy (1986), the model of instructional leadership is dependent on critical components on instructional management. The three mechanisms that the model encompasses are

- (a) having a clear vision and mission, (b) managing the instructional programs, and
- (c) endorsing a positive school culture and climate.

Principals' Responsibilities in Closing Achievement Gaps

According to Ng and Szeto (2015), “The impact of education reforms, the changing of students’ diverse needs, and the expectations of teachers, parents, and the community all contribute to the complexity of the job of principalship” (p. 540). With increased accountability systems, principals are held to a higher standard to raise student expectations, improve school culture and climate, and elevate instructional practices (Liebowitz & Porter, 2019). Blazar, Gilbert, Herlihy, and Gogolen (2018) presented information on the role of leaders’ facilitating and coaching practices that inspire teachers

to support their leaders' initiatives, making them credible leaders. Thus, leaders build positive learning communities for their teachers through their efforts and they encourage them with their interactions and language. Language is also vital because style brings meaning to ideas and frames experiences for successful teaching. According to the research, effective leaders are successful because of their positive and persuasive interactions with their teachers. This in turn leads to students' academic successes and closing of achievement gaps.

The primary process for closing the achievement gap is through the leadership that educational professionals exercise, especially at the campus level (Yeh, 2017). Beard (2018) noted that leaders' decision making has a direct impact on the school environment, culture, and climate of a school. These three components then affect the result of how students meet academic goals. School leaders play a significant role in educating and closing achievement gaps for linguistically diverse populations, primarily when English language learners are taught at the same time as non-ELLs, for literacy counts in our society for the next generation (Pacheco & Miller, 2016). Pacheco and Miller (2016) also asserted that school leaders have an acute role as change agents in closing achievement gaps. Berkovich (2016) noted that, when serving in a leadership role, leaders exert influence on their followers.

Pacheco and Miller (2016) noted that it was imperative to produce instructional environments that accelerate and foster learning for English language learners. Therefore, it was essential to have leaders who recognize how students, teachers, and principals learn to implement instructional practices in their schools that lead to closing

achievement gaps. Pacheco and Miller claimed that one instructional practice is cultivating knowledge through literacy, which provides students with experiences in reading during which they can make connections to their text. Learning is not limited only to what happens in the classroom setting, but also by the individuals who have been allowed to lead (Pacheco & Miller, 2016).

Leadership Styles

The transformational leadership style is one of the most popular models studied around the world (Bush, 2018). According to Mayes and Gethers (2018), there is evidence that principals believe that they have transformational leadership qualities. However, sometimes, their expectations and facts are not aligned. The staff might view differently some transformational leaders and their community depending on their understanding of transformational leadership (Mayes & Gethers, 2018). One of the significant components of transformational leadership is sustaining a vision and mission that is shared among the members of a learning community. The central paradigm is that principals have a collective clear vision and mission that leads to a better future for the organization in which everyone is committed (Bush, 2018; Makgato & Mudzanani, 2019; Ninković & Knežević, 2018)

Another essential component of transformational leadership is closing achievement gaps in which campus principals work towards establishing a positive school culture and climate that builds trust by having a constructive relationship with staff and communicating effectively in an encouraging manner. Principals who build school culture to sustain improvement initiatives also improve student achievement

(Damanik & Aldridge, 2017; Dutta, & Sahney, 2016; McCarley et al., 2016; Damanik and Aldridge (2017) stated that, in self-efficacy, four climate factors were observed with staff collegiality: goal consensus, work pressure, resource adequacy, and staff autonomy. According to Dutta and Sahney (2016), the physical school climate and culture play a role in deciding the instructional leadership and relationship as it pertains to professional contentment.

Qualities of Effective Leaders

Educational leaders today recognize the significant role that highly effective school principals play in schools (Boyland, Lehman, & Sriver, 2015). According to Qadach, Schechter, & Da'as (2020), principals are tasked with learning that is continuous and should build on school improvement initiatives regardless of outside barriers (e.g., social and political issues). Through the new era of accountability at the state and federal level, the importance of school improvement (with the innovative skill set for school leaders) has become essential to meet the challenges of the 21st century learner (Boyland et al., 2015; Cosner, Kimball, Barkowski, Carl, & Jones, 2015). School principals hold significant positions in education; consequently, they need to be highly effective instructional leaders to guarantee student academic success in the classroom through instructional coaching. Principals support their teachers instructionally (Bettini, Mason-Williams, & Barber, 2019). One central area is where principals enter classrooms to evaluate teachers' instructional practices. Principals might be able to provide professional development to improve instructional engagement (Boyland et al., 2015).

Kraft and Gilmour (2016) described that principals need to promote teacher development through the evaluation process that they are required to do yearly. Kraft and Gilmour claimed that the degree in which principals prepared for this responsibility has necessary implications on teacher instructional implications as it affects student achievement. In addition, observations should be sustained and be ongoing with constructive feedback (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016). However, according to Cosner et al. (2015), the new teacher and principal evaluation system, which coincides with the new accountability system, can place pressures on and can conflict with the relationship between principal and teacher, who are the two people with the most impact on campus. Nonetheless, effective leaders will be able to nurture this relationship to ensure academic success. Kraft and Gilmour (2016) stated that another useful model would be pairing highly effective teachers with less effective colleagues on specific instructional practices to improve their teaching skills and engagement. Therefore, to become highly effective instructional leaders, principals must be provided with extensive training to develop the skills to lead and motivate teachers according to their feedback from the evaluation system (Cosner et al., 2015). Therefore, as Goe, Wylie, Bosso, and Olson (2017) stated, commitment between teachers and principals has become a substantial factor for having academic success.

Another vital component that might be acknowledged about effective principals who achieve high levels of understanding about their leadership role is having proficiencies that are essential in accomplishing their leadership responsibilities (Kirtman & Fullan, 2016). Additionally, effective leaders are organized and able to prioritize their

job responsibilities during a school day. Cosner et al. (2015) noted that principals spent more than half their time on tasks that dealt with student discipline and parental meetings. However, these same principals spent about 13% on instructional leadership activities, where they are needed most to support teachers with classroom instructional practices (Cosner et al., 2015). The method of strategically supporting teachers by providing useful feedback, coaching, and assisting with developing their craft is where the most significant student achievement impact can be made (Cosner et al., 2015; Kraft & Gilmour, 2016).

Therefore, universities and school districts must do a better job of developing leaders so they can lead successful schools (Williams, 2015). According to Bush (2018), high-quality field experiences in preparation programs are essential for future principals as they learn on the job. Principal preparation programs across the United States in university-level programs used field experiences because of its effectiveness in preparing principals (Weiner & Burton, 2016). Furthermore, principal preparation programs in school districts build into their field experiences through aspiring principals' academies that experienced principals mentor (Weiner & Burton, 2016). Leaders influence the attitude and promote a culture of high expectations and behavior of their staff; consequently, the level of the instruction given to students depends on the teachers' morals (McKinney, Labat, & Labat, 2015).

Consequently, a good rapport between teachers and the principal has a significant influence on student learning. Preparation programs for campus leadership can play a critical role and responsibility in meeting the instructional needs of leaders to support their staff (Cosner et al., 2015; Prezyna, Garrison, Lockte, & Gold, 2017). Finally, Balkar

(2015) maintained that principals must distinguish the development of shared decision making as a vital practice on their campus. When teachers are engaged in addressing needs and being part of the solution, they will partake more positively in creating action results (Balkar, 2015).

Classroom Teachers' Roles

Historically, teachers have been professionals who are primarily responsible for teaching students across the Nation. However, Russell (2018) noted that, regarding teacher-student relationships, students often stated that they held resentment towards their teachers as the only person in their classrooms with full authority in what they learned. Teachers need to employ what they have learned through professional development and training so that their students will actively partake in classroom lessons. Thus, as Holdsworth and Maynes (2017) advocated, constructive changes in closing achievement gaps arise when teachers become change agents and impart innovative ideas.

If the teachers believed that they influenced their students' learning, they would have a sense of empowerment and would feel as though they had decision-making power (Lee & Youyan, 2016; Wong, Indiatsi, & Wong, 2016). In a study about psychological empowerment among teachers, Lee and Youyan (2016) established that teachers conveyed that they were more devoted to their teaching when they had autonomy. They preferred being part of the decision-making process about their classrooms (Lee & Youyan, 2016; Wong et al., 2016). There are many aspects to contemplate when discoursing about the educator's self-efficacy and learner outcomes. Teacher interactions

with students are perpetual. Therefore, teacher comportment might affect student learner outcomes (Martinez, McMahon, Corker, & Keys, 2016; Master et al., 2016).

Qualities of Effective Teachers

The importance of educating all students is critical to prepare them for their future. Peterson (2016) noted that it is an everyday challenge for teachers to address the academic needs of students because of the increased numbers of diverse students in today's classrooms. With the new diversity of students in classes, teachers need to reflect on instructional practices and adjust their lessons and activities according to their students' learning needs. From President Johnson's administration to President Obama's administration, a 43-year span, the achievement gap has stayed nearly the same (Peterson, 2016).

Rizwan and Khan (2015) noted that teachers must be more understanding of their students with their varied needs and learning styles to close achievement gaps. In addition, teachers who love their job need to build positive relationships with their students (Master et al., 2016; Irby, Lara-Alecio, Fuhui, Guerrero, Sutton-Jones & Abdelrahman, 2018; Rizwan & Khan, 2015; Wong et al., 2016). Rizwan and Khan (2015) found that when teachers were partaking in activities enthusiastically and knowing how children develop and learn led to effective learning methods in the classroom. Another important instructional learning strategy for teachers would be to use humor to engage students in their content learning. This may lead to closing the achievement gaps (Master et al., 2016; Rizwan & Khan, 2015; Wong et al., 2016).

Instructional Practices

Helping all teachers understand the issues they face and gain knowledge in instructional practices are advantageous. Still, teachers need to be encouraged to think analytically about the problems they are facing within the classroom setting to develop plans of action (Kennedy, 2016b). One instructional practice is teaching through conversations in small groups to facilitate academic learning in schools. Current research on discussions and enhanced language methods are being advanced that contrast with past traditional and direct instructional practices (Lawrence, Crosson, Pare´-Blagoev, & Snow, 2015; Lawrence, Francis, Pare´-Blagoev, & Snow, 2016). Portes et al. (2018) described how instructional practices engage students with conversations and collaboration so that students learn from each other.

Another study on instructional practices was by Peercy, Beltran, Silverman, and Nunn (2015) examined the way that teachers work collaboratively and use distributed and distributive learning with each other as they serve the English language students within the four walls of their classrooms. The students in the research were in Kindergarten to Grade 4 and came from three elementary schools who worked with study buddies using narrative and expository text. The instruction took place in classroom settings during the English Language Arts class with lesson summaries, text types, and focal vocabulary words. Peercy et al. (2015) found that there was convincing evidence that teachers with constant dialogue applied both distributed cognition and distributed expertise, while in the “learning circle” they learned more and contributed to the “whole” group in learning within the classroom settings. Peercy et al. found that, when teachers met and discussed

instruction and how students were responding to the text, the students were more successful in learning (see Irby et al., 2018). What Irby et al. (2018) found most compelling was that teachers were able to reflect and make needed adjustments according to the needs of the ELL students, while incorporating peer study buddies in mainstream classrooms. The theory was grounded on sociocultural theory. Peercy et al. (2015) and Irby et al. (2018) addressed an essential facet of instructional delivery and support through a collegiate body of teachers who were willing to share best practices according to the students' participation and engagement in the lesson while reading text with study buddies and with the whole group instruction. Peercy et al. (2015) found that when teachers worked in "structured" planning and conversations on the "how" to help and facilitate learning, they were able to observe real knowledge in real-time.

Professional Development

According to Lee, Llosa, Jian, Hass, Connor, and Booven (2016), professional development must be focused on meeting the needs of all students and on the teachers' knowledge of instructional practices. For teachers to be well-trained according to their professional development needs, they should focus on content knowledge and being able to engage in the learning themselves (Bohon, Rhodes, & Robnolt, 2017; Franco-Fuenmayor & Waxman, 2015; Lee et al., 2016; Castro & Silva, 2015; Hadjioannou, Hutchinson, & Hockman, 2016). Continual professional development can have a positive influence on educational quality and alignment to expectations for student performance. It is advantageous because the student and school improvement go hand and hand with attaining essential goals in academic settings (Wang et al., 2017). Classroom teachers

also must feel as though they can make instructional choices that will support their learning and implementation of what they have learned through professional development (Hadjioannou, Hutchinson, & Hockman, 2016). Lee et al. (2016) noted that active professional development provided teachers the opportunity to use scaffolding in the curriculum in a manner that promotes student learning. Teachers who are trained might be able to implement research-based instructional practices for ELLs (Franco-Fuenmayor & Waxman, 2015).

Culturally Responsive Instructors

Whitaker and Valtierra (2018) offered information on enhancing preservice teachers' motivation to teach diverse learners. Examples were given regarding ways to engage diverse learners so that they would be fully involved in their learning. One strategy was having students participate in making connections with content (see Whitaker & Valtierra, 2018). In addition, according to Frye (2015), faithfulness to research methods could make an operative transformation in the reduction of the achievement gap. Thus, to narrow the achievement gap, sound research practices must be implemented in classrooms to close the achievement gap (Frye, 2015; Steenbergen-Hu, 2017). According to Huang (2015), implementing research-based practices develops ELL students' academic responsibility, persistence, and focus, and it narrows the ELL achievement gap.

Reflective Feedback

According to Choy, Lee, and Sedhu (2019), reflective feedback is an essential practice that teachers use to affect student learning and to implement changes in

instructional practices and teaching experiences. Through reflective feedback, teachers could improve on their instructional delivery to enhance their craft in the classroom; thereby, increasing student achievement (Choy et al., 2019). Barnhart and van Es (2015) found that teachers who used reflective thinking were able to interpret the educational needs of their students' responses throughout the lesson and they could respond more aptly to their students' questions. Therefore, employing reflective thinking allowed the teachers to use teaching as a learning tool. Reflective feedback enabled them to hone these skills on reflective thinking over time. Finally, teachers who were asked to reflect more often on their teaching found that it assisted them with problem-solving and problem resolution (Hayden & Chiu, 2015).

Summary

In Chapter 2, I provided information from the literature that highlighted the different practices and processes that principals implemented to close achievement gaps of ELLs. By conducting a basic qualitative study, I provided the necessary practices that could enrich the principal's role. In the literature review section, my goal was to examine the roles of principals as they pertain to their practices, procedures, and processes on their campuses in relation to ELLs. What is known is that ELLs do have academic achievement gaps. According to state and national assessments, the achievement gaps continue to show a downward trend. Many principals today face many challenges within their scope of the leadership role. Kraft and Gilmour (2016) noted that school principals are key factors in turning around schools with clear goals and expectations in addition to creating a positive school culture for both teachers and students. According to Kraft and

Gilmour, effective principals motivate all stakeholders to improve the learning of all students. Principals necessitate teacher instructional implications that affect student achievement (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016). In Chapter 3, I describe the methodology of this basic qualitative study. I include the manner in which the participants were invited, and all of the details related to the instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis. I have also safeguarded the participants' rights and confidentiality. Finally, I established the key points to validate and ensure the trustworthiness of the researcher.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the behaviors and practices that principals used to address the instruction of ELLs in their schools. In Chapter 3, I address the research method for the study, including the design, rationale, and role of the researcher. The basic qualitative research design allowed me to explore a phenomenon from the participants' perspectives regarding how to close the academic achievement gaps of ELLs. The ethical implications, trustworthiness, interview procedures, and a summary are also included in this chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

The research design for this inquiry was a basic qualitative study. With one-to-one interviews, I investigated the principals' behaviors about their roles in closing the ELL academic achievement gap by examining the following two central questions:

RQ1: How do principals describe their role in addressing the ELL achievement gap?

RQ2: How do principals describe the practices, processes, and procedures that they use to address improving ELL instruction?

Other qualitative designs are grounded theory, phenomenology, and participatory action research. However, these designs were not suitable for my study. Grounded theory design involves developing a theory that is lacking (Burkholder, Cox, & Crawford 2016). The phenomenological design involves the researcher deriving the meaning of the participants' lived experiences. The participatory action design allows participants and

researchers to collaborate to provide recommendations from the data analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

I chose a basic qualitative design to explore the principals' behaviors in closing the academic achievement gaps of ELLs. I selected the qualitative methodology because of the setting and purpose. Qualitative inquiry allows researchers to capture the behaviors and perspectives of participants (Patton, 2015). Creswell and Guetterman (2019) noted that qualitative methodology allows researchers to study a problem with unknown variables by exploring multiple perspectives. I selected a qualitative approach to align with the research purpose.

The basic qualitative design allowed me to study a phenomenon (closing the academic gaps of ELLs) in real-life settings through the perspectives of participants coupled with studying the environment to gain detailed information and insight (see Nowakowski, 2019; Stahl, King, & Lampi, 2019). According to Stahl et al. (2017), this design allows the collaboration between the interviewer and interviewee during information sharing. I coded interview transcripts, wrote analytical memos, and created thematic summaries of the data. Some of the components considered in this study were leadership practices (e.g., ELL instructional strategies and the responsibilities of principals and teachers). Additional elements were communication processes, personal and organizational professional development, and culturally responsive school culture and climate. I focused the narrative design on the perception of human experience, as stated by the participants (Clandinin, 2016; Flick, 2018; Merriam & Grenier, 2019). This design was not appropriate for my study.

A quantitative approach was also not appropriate for this study because the purpose did not require statistical information for data analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Yazan (2015) provided an overview of the elements influencing the effectiveness of a qualitative study: (a) type of research questions, (b) the control of the researcher over events under investigation, and (c) the degree of contemporary focus on the research. I used the research questions in the current study to address how and why a phenomenon happened without employing control of the events around it.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I recruited participants, conducted interviews, transcribed the recordings verbatim, and analyzed the data. I ensured that my experiences and personal biases did not factor into the research. I did not allow my preferences to interfere with the research, despite being a current superintendent of schools. Additionally, I had no supervisory or professional relationships with the participants.

To mitigate possible biases, I asked each participant to review the transcript to ensure statements reflected what they wished to share. I also asked them to review my initial interpretations to ensure that I had presented the meaning of their data appropriately. Throughout the process, I ensured that personal preconceptions did not interfere with the development of trust with participants. I used a reflective journal to help in identifying and bracketing my biases. Trusting my ability to take accurate notes of the data professionally and ethically was of utmost importance. I never allowed my personal experiences to cloud the interpretation of the data.

Methodology

With a basic qualitative design, I explored how the participants' roles and behaviors influenced closing the achievement gaps of ELLs in their schools. I collected the data through one-to-one, semistructured, Zoom interviews with principals. The approach provided insight into the principals' behaviors in closing the achievement gaps of ELLs. I focused on organizing and managing the data that I collected.

Participant Selection

I used purposeful sampling to select participants who met specific characteristics (Patton, 2002) and who were able to provide the most relevant information (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The participants selected for a qualitative study are those who can contribute the most to addressing the research problem and research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To gain insight on the principals' behaviors concerning closing the gaps of ELLs, criteria were established. Four school districts with varying class sizes agreed to be part of the research. I selected the participants according to (a) the characteristics of the student population at the principal's campus, (b) the existence of an academic achievement gap between all students and the ELLs at the school, and (c) the principals' knowledge regarding ELLs. Creswell and Poth (2018) noted that a sample size of 3-10 participants is sufficient for a basic qualitative research design in exploring a phenomenon. Each participant selected met the established criteria of (a) serving at least 10% ELL students according to the state report card, (b) having 2 years of experience and being an employee of the district, and (c) the principal's campus being proximal to the United States-Mexico border. My goal was to have 10 principals participate in the study.

I determined the participant selection by the criteria that ensured that the data collected would be relevant in answering the research questions. Again, I had no supervisory or professional relationship with the participants.

Yazan (2015) indicated that selecting multiple sites would generate a robust base for generalizing the findings of my study. The use of 10 participants and various sites for qualitative research has been established in the field of education (Duffy, Springer, Delaney, & Luke, 2020; Pappa, 2020). Pappa (2020) conducted a study on barriers underlying organizational performance with 10 participants and found that the efficiency of an organization is reduced because of the low professional competency of the staff.

Instrumentation

I used this basic qualitative study to address the behaviors and practices that principals use to promote the instruction of ELLs in their schools. Interviews are an essential source of data in a basic qualitative study (Yin, 2018). During the current study, I posed questions during 1-hour, individual, semistructured, Zoom interviews to collect data. I sent the participants emails with a follow-up phone call to schedule interviews according to their availability. I developed the questions formulated for the virtual, one-to-one, Zoom interviews from the two research questions. I allotted at least 1 hour for interviews to allow me to use additional probing questions to clarify the principal's stance on ELL achievement. Once I concluded the interviews, I emailed to the participants their responses for their review and confirmation of accuracy.

Table 1 contains the interview questions that I addressed, and the two research questions. I formulated the questions using the Hallinger's (2011) framework that

encompasses a school's mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting positive school learning. When creating the interview questions, I focused on the research questions to ensure clarity and keen focus on the topic. According to Saldana (2016), questions posed should be worded for the participants to respond using their knowledge and personal work experiences. After I formulated the questions, I reviewed and revised them to ensure that the answers would provide the data to answer the research questions. My dissertation committee reviewed the interview questions to ensure that I had avoided researcher bias. The committee gave me feedback on the number of questions asked for the 1-hour of allotted time.

Table 1

Interview Questions to Address Research Questions

Research question	Interview questions
1. How do principals describe their role in addressing the ELL achievement gaps?	1. How do you communicate your vision and mission in closing the gaps of ELLs? Please elaborate. 2. What is your role in influencing and providing support to teachers with English language learners? How is this communicated and monitored? 3. What actions through positive school culture do you believe are necessary to support teachers with English language learners? Please elaborate. 4. How do you best collaborate with teachers of English language learners? Please elaborate. 5. Describe what your leadership style should be in relation to supporting teachers who work with English language learners, and why? (<i>table continues</i>) 6. Describe the type of professional development you believe is essential for you to supply teachers with English language learners and why?

Research question	Interview questions
2. How do principals describe the practices, processes, and procedures that they use to address improving ELL instruction?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do you align instructional practices based on data? 2. Describe your role in providing reflective feedback as a means of supporting teachers of English language learners. 3. Describe your role in providing instructional coaching that is essential to support teachers with English language Learners through visibility in classrooms. 4. Describe your role in providing instructional resources to teachers with English language learners and why. 5. Describe your role in supporting culturally sensitive environments and how you accomplish that. 6. What types of instructional practices and processes are essential for you to supply to teachers to support them in working with English language learners? Please elaborate.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Once I had obtained the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, the recruitment of participants for the study began. Superintendents had signed the partner agreement letters and provided a list of principals. I sent an email of invitation to the principals, requesting their participation in an in-depth interview. The invitation described the informed consent process and described the purpose of the study. Principals who chose to participate provided their informed consent via email. The principals understood that participation was voluntary. Informed consent protects the participants' rights during all aspects of the study (Ross, Iguchi, & Panicker, 2018). The participants who responded met the set criteria.

The specific parameters of basic qualitative research determined the formulation of the list of participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Following the selection of the 10 principals for the study, I set a day, time, and location to begin conducting the interviews. Communication occurred via phone call, and I obtained follow-up confirmation through email. Before the start of the interview, each participant reread the information on the informed consent form and indicated by email with “I agree” to participate in the study and who could withdraw from the study with no penalty. Once I obtained informed consent, I reviewed the interview norms with the participants to minimize interruptions to preserve confidentiality. I gave a copy of the consent form to the participants for their records. I interviewed each participant on the date and time decided on within the 6-week interview period. I conducted each interview session in English and began with a description of the study. I gave assurance of confidentiality at the time of the scheduled interview. For this study, I interviewed each participant via virtual Zoom face-to-face and I maintained a digital audio-record as a backup plan. I kept an additional audio-recorder and batteries on hand in the event that the main audio-device malfunctioned. Immediately after the interview, I transcribed the digital audio recording.

I scheduled the meetings for 1-hour increments to ensure that the participants had sufficient time to provide in-depth answers and to follow up with probing questions. I conducted the follow up discussions via email, Zoom, or phone calls. Transcribing involved listening to the recordings, typing the responses verbatim, and using a Microsoft Word spreadsheet on the computer. When I completed the transcription, I emailed the transcripts to the participants for their review to ensure that I had captured accurately

their words from their initial interviews. I afforded the participants 5 days to review thoroughly their answers to the questions and to return for any modifications or editions.

Data Analysis Plan

The qualitative data analysis concludes reasonably from the data that I collected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The data for this study were gathered using 60-minute, one-to-one, virtual Zoom, semistructured interviews. I began the data analysis with the analysis of transcripts and documents that I reviewed via open coding and thematic analysis as Creswell and Poth (2018), Ravitch and Carl (2016), and Saldana (2016) had established. After the interviews, the focus on organizing the information was vital to manage the data. The next process entailed transcribing and using analytic notes from the 60-minute, virtual Zoom, one-to-one, interview questions. Initial coding was next on the process, using some of the priori codes from the literature. I began with labeling the data collected (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Soon after the precoding, coding followed so that I could seek meaning as a data analysis strategy in which I apportioned a short description to categorize the data and to find patterns (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Saldana, 2016). I used a codebook to organize better the data analysis. Open coding allowed me to generate as many codes as possible (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This analytical process led me to a variety of concepts and ideas from the transcriptions.

For the first cycle of coding, I used a spreadsheet with descriptive codes. I transferred the content of the transcriptions to coding columns, using a Microsoft Word worksheet with a column for the participant, the research question, a prior code, common codes, and themes to organize the transcript data. I then looked for recurring categories,

and reoccurring themes, terms, and I charted the patterns from each participant in the study for further analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The thematic analysis then followed on the right side of the Microsoft Word spreadsheet. I then searched for documented specific words, phrases, and sentences that related to principals' roles and influences as they related to closing the achievement gaps of ELLs. The coding allowed me to compare and view indefinite patterns from the answers of the participants.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Researchers are responsible for conveying the integrity of the research study by maintaining their trustworthiness and credibility of the data. In this basic qualitative research study, the data resonated with the experiences of the participant (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The data collected was determined by the behaviors and practices of the researcher and the interviewees' contexts. I geared the development and design of the interview questions to explore the principals' roles according to their behaviors in closing the academic achievement gaps of ELLs.

Credibility

I addressed the credibility issues and related bias from the beginning of the planning of the study with protocols throughout the basic qualitative study. The first element in the selection process that I used for this study was to ensure that the participants had experience as current campus principals for the importance of the credibility of this basic qualitative study. All of the participants had at least 2 years of principalship experience; the superintendent of their district verified this as a prerequisite. Excluding bias ensured the authenticity of the experiences of the participants. The

participants were anonymous to each other during the study. Hence, no personal biases or opinions affected the interviewees' context.

Transferability

I achieved transferability by providing a detailed description of the data that I collected from the participants and the archival data analysis (Yen, 2018). The transferability speaks directly to how well this study resonated with other individuals from other school districts that would be able to use the information for their students. I shared the transcriptions with the participants for further clarifications and modifications of the findings that I might have misinterpreted.

The sample for the study consisted of public school principals who lead campuses with specific student populations, and had knowledge of ELLs, and whose school districts were in close proximity to the United States-Mexican border. The transferable aspect of the study was the practices that principals used to close the achievement gaps of ELLs. I designed the interview questions to obtain the data that pertained to the tenets of the research study and provided detailed descriptions of the setting and norms that were vital to the study. Using participants from different communities lead to a diverse range of views on the phenomena. By using an inductive approach to analyze the data within the context of the study, transferability goals occurred for future research on closing the achievement gaps of ELLs.

Dependability

Dependability addresses the quality of integrity used for the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To begin, by comparing the data that I gathered from interviews, I

established reliability through the consistency of the inquiry. Dependability addressed the quality and integrity employed for this study. I established an audit trail by reflective journaling concerning the collection and transcriptions of the data. A transcription review and member checking was part of the trustworthiness process. During the virtual one-to-one Zoom interview, I recorded all of the information using a digital voice recorder. I shared that information later with participants and I checked for accuracy. To strengthen the dependability, I emailed the transcripts for their review to verify the interpretations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Yin, 2018). With this process, I applied changes for correctness to affirm their answers, so the data reflect the principals' behaviors and experiences. Accuracy and consistency in recording and interpreting the data were of utmost importance (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Yin, 2018).

Confirmability

Confirmability denotes the degree to which the participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) can confirm the results of the study. I guaranteed confirmability with the participants having the opportunity to confirm their responses from the interview. Through the audit trails, I analyzed and interpreted all of the data as it pertained to the study. I recorded the data and took notes taken during the interviews. Soon after each interview, I recorded my impressions and took notes. As the researcher, I founded confirmability in the research study through consistent reflexive practice, memo writing, and recognition of personal biases, behaviors, and assumptions that were related to closing the achievement gaps of ELLs (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). As the researcher, I was crucially mindful of my role during the interview process. For confirmability to occur

during the interview, it was my responsibility to remain unbiased, keep an open mind, and adapt to what the data disclosed. I used a reflexive journal to monitor any personal biases about the research. I bracketed any assumptions on my part and did not use them for the analysis section of the study.

Ethical Procedures

This study was a dissertation; therefore, it required the Walden University IRB approval (No. 08-19-20-075123). To obtain the approval number, I followed the IRB ethical compliance to guarantee safeguards to protect the participants, institutions, and researchers (Burkholder et al., 2016). My dissertation program was an Advanced Education Administrative Leadership program; therefore, I followed the specific steps and filled out forms to gain approval. Step 1 was to obtain partner agreements from four of the school districts that had already consented verbally to participate. I used the form from the Advanced Education Administrative Leadership Dissertation Manual and submitted it via email. My research did not begin until I had attained the IRB approval, which occurred 10 business days after I had submitted the form. Soon after, I began to reach out via district emails to the participants. It took 2 days to acquire their consent, and then I began scheduling the interviews according to the day and time of their availability. I emailed the consent form to the participants, explaining the study, the risk factors, their choice to participate, and the privacy of their identity through pseudonyms.

In this study, I captured the participants' knowledge. Some of the risks might pertain to misinterpretations of the participant's responses to the questions. However, this risk was minimal because I allowed the participants to review via email my initial

interpretations for accuracy or any misinterpretations. I interviewed the principals via virtual, Zoom, semistructured interviews and I explained to them in detail what was included and excluded from the study. In addition, I protected at all times all of the information from my transcribed notes until I would destroy them after 5 years. I emailed the participants from this study the agreement form to ensure that they understood the procedures and expectations of the research. As the researcher, I had to be mindful of any preconceived ideas and personal experiences that might interfere with the findings of the research. These preconceived ideas would have caused ethical implications that might have occurred throughout the data collection. Ethical guidelines underscore the significance of maintaining the confidentiality of the identities of the participants and ensuring the integrity of the study.

Additionally, an amicable relationship between the participants and interviewer was essential for the interview. Choosing to conduct oneself with a moral compass of right and wrong should be of absolute importance to gaining knowledge and insight into the research study. Again, one must remain objective and not include one's own biases and prejudices so that one does not hinder the analysis of the research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Finally, the examination was respectful to the participant's time, for I paid particular attention to the details and ensured that the technology tools were up and running. This safety was critical to ensure that the participants felt comfortable throughout the interview process. I kept all of the data confidential by using pseudonyms to protect the participants in the study. I shared with individual participants as they requested any documents that I created in the study. I shared an executive summary of the

study with the superintendents and other researchers. I collected and stored under lock and key in a locked file all of the documents that I used for the study. I will maintain, store, and file for 5 years on a USB drive the data documents. After the 5 years, I will destroy the USB and my notes that I accumulated during the study.

Summary

A significant driver for the research study was that ELL students in the region had scored considerably lower than their non-ELL classmates had. Looking at the previous 5 years, the trend of ELLs' low achievement continued to spiral downward. When having discussions with other leaders, they voiced the same challenges. Campus leaders must find ways in which to meet the demands of accountability systems at both the state and federal levels. This social issue must be addressed and explored, and it requires real-world solutions. Looking at successful practices in closing achievement gaps of ELLs can potentially influence their lives in their communities, their state, the Nation, and the world. The research questions guided the research in alignment with the problem and purpose of the study. In Chapter 4, I discuss the results and findings of the basic qualitative research.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the behaviors and practices that principals use to address the instruction of ELLs in their schools. The research problem was the importance of understanding principals' roles as instructional leaders in closing the achievement gaps of ELLs. I sought to discover the behaviors, practices, and processes that principals implemented to close the achievement gaps of ELLs on their campuses. Research in this area is needed to understand how principals could provide instructional support to increase ELLs' proficiency levels in state and federal assessments. I chose purposeful sampling and collected data from 10 principals to examine their roles as principals in closing the ELL achievement gaps. From the data that I gathered, I identified categories and themes to understand campus principals' roles in closing the academic achievement gaps of ELLs.

I drew the conceptual framework that I used for this study from Hallinger's (2011) model of instructional leadership, which was focused on instructional supervision and management. I established the research questions using the concepts from Hallinger's conceptual framework:

RQ1: How do principals describe their role in addressing the ELL achievement gap?

RQ2: How do principals describe the practices, processes, and procedures that they use to address improving ELL instruction?

To answer the research questions for this qualitative study, I collected data from semistructured interviews. Chapter 4 includes an explanation of the findings of the study

and the setting of the participants. I have described the methods of collecting, organizing, recording, and analyzing the data in detail. The chapter closes with a summary of the results as they relate to Hallinger's (2011) framework in leadership.

Setting

The research study took place in a southern area of the United States near the Mexican border. I conducted the interviews via Zoom because of the coronavirus pandemic. I emailed the Interview Protocol form (Appendices A and B) to gain consent from the superintendents from the four participating school districts. The superintendents shared the contact information of 15 possible participants, and those who chose to participate promptly emailed their responses. Ten educational leaders agreed to participate, but five others declined because of time restraints and other job-related responsibilities. The 10 principals who agreed to participate replied via email with words "I consent" or "I agree to participate in the study." As soon as the participants agreed, I created a Microsoft Word codebook document with each participant's information. The school districts and principals met the criteria of (a) 10% ELL population overall depending on the state report card, (b) 2 years of experience and employed by the district, and (c) the proximity of the principal's campus to the United States-Mexico border. I scheduled the interviews to accommodate the participants' job demands.

Participant Profiles

Table 2 provides a summary of the participants' sex, campus type, and years of experience.

Table 2

Demographic Information of Participants

Participant	Sex	Campus type	Administrative experience (years)
HSP1	Female	High school	9
HSP2	Male	High school	6
MSP1	Male	Middle school	6
MSP2	Male	Middle school	6
MSP3	Male	Middle school	20
MSP4	Male	Middle school	13
ESP1	Female	Elementary school	3
ESP2	Male	Elementary school	6
ESP3	Male	Elementary school	32
ESP4	Female	Elementary school	5

Principal HSP1 had served 23 years in a leadership capacity. She had served as a high school principal for 9 years and had worked at her current position for 3 years. The last two high schools she led had student populations of more than 2,500. She reported, “Every student can learn when provided with appropriate time, treatment, and tools.” HSP1 was eager to share her information because it would serve as a body of knowledge for others in her field.

Principal HSP2 had served in education for 15 years. The same district had employed him for 5 years and at the same high school. His leadership experiences included 3 years as a dean of instruction, 3 years as an assistant principal, and 2 years as a

lead physics teacher. His approach was “treat others the way you would want to be treated.”

Principal MSP1 had served in a leadership capacity for 12 years. He had served in his current position for 7 years in the same school district. When discussing his educational philosophy, he stated that his role is “to guide, nurture, and assist teachers to be well rounded so that the ultimate goals are student success.” He explained that he looks forward to reporting to his campus daily because he knows the importance of his job in shaping the future. MSP1 also mentioned that he was eager to share his best practices as a leader for future principals who will join the profession.

Principal MSP2 had led his current campus for years and had been with the district for 23 years. He asserted that he had served for 15 years in a leadership capacity. His educational philosophy was “whatever it takes to educate all (All Means All).” He mentioned that working as a principal had added considering meaning to his life while serving others.

Principal MSP3 had 18 years of experience with 13 years in an administrative position. He noted that he had worked with his current school district for 4 years and had much respect for his superintendent. When he spoke about his role in leading a campus, he spoke with conviction and pride. He explained that his philosophy was “building relationships is key to the learning process.”

Principal MSP4 had served in a leadership capacity for 11 years as an assistant principal and had served 10 years as a campus principal. The same district had employed him for 27 years. He mentioned that his passion, motivation, and love for what he does is

what drives him daily as he walks through the doors of his campus. He reported that the “principal’s role is to serve the staff, students, and community.”

Principal EP1 had been a principal at her current campus for 3 years and at the same district for 19 years. In her 9 years of serving in a leadership capacity, she had served as a principal, assistant principal, instructional facilitator, grade-level chair, and campus technologist. She stated that her philosophy was that “each student deserves a quality education and they will receive exactly that when we lead through service and act with both our minds and our hearts.”

Principal EP2 had served in his current position for 7 years. He had served 25 years in education, including 22 years in administrative roles. He explained that his philosophy of education was “the key to leadership is building relationships that allow you to empower and motivate teachers.” He noted that he would not have chosen another profession because of the relationships built within the educational family.

Principal EP3 had served in education for 29 years, all with the same school district. He had 22 years of administrative experience. When he spoke about his philosophy of education, he explained, “We need to provide students with the best educational opportunity to be successful in life.” EP3 spoke with passion and foresight when he referred to his staff and students.

Principal EP4 had served in education for 16 years, including 10 years in leadership roles. In her current position, she had served as the campus principal for 6 years. Her philosophy of education was to “be of service to my staff and students and provide them the instructional tools needed to be successful and close the academic

achievement gaps.” She explained how she lived and breathed to close the gaps of all her students and developing teacher leaders.

As soon as the 10 participants emailed their agreement to be part of the study, data collection began. I collected the data by conducting one-to-one, recorded, Zoom interviews to elicit the participants’ responses. The Zoom conference software allowed access to others without being in the same physical room. Zoom provided a camera view, and I provided the access. Zoom also allowed the audio recording of the interviews.

Data Collection

According to the Walden University IRB guidelines, I notified the four superintendents from the districts who agreed to the study, and I emailed the prospective participants. Measures to collect the data began soon after receiving the final Walden University IRB approval (No. 08-19-20-0751231). I provided the participating individuals with general information about the study; it included risks and benefits. The participants who were interested in being part of the study replied with their approvals via emails. I sent a follow-up email thanking them for their willingness to volunteer to take part in the study. I scheduled the meeting dates to be conducted via Zoom because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The day of the scheduled Zoom meeting, I sent a follow-up reminder via email and by a phone call to confirm the interview time.

Individual Semistructured Interviews

This basic qualitative study addressed the behaviors and practices that principals use to address the instruction of ELLs in their schools regarding closing achievement gaps. I conducted one-to-one interviews to gather data regarding the participants’

processes, practices, and behaviors. Semistructured audio-recorded interviews were the best method for data collection. During the semistructured interviews, the participants felt at ease and shared information freely and willingly. I encouraged all of them throughout the experience. I designed the interview questions to provide a bridge to the questions that followed. The semistructured audio interviews allowed the flow of the interview to be smooth throughout the recordings.

I conducted the semistructured interviews via Zoom at a scheduled day and time, as the participants had requested. Under normal circumstances, I would have conducted the interviews at their campus, but the participants were working out of their homes because of the COVID-19 pandemic. All participants chose to have the interviews conducted after work hours. I scheduled the interviews between August 20 and August 31, 2020. Each interview took approximately 60 minutes. Before the interview started, I explained the purpose of the research along with the consent specificities of the research. The following are the topics that I shared with the participants: (a) interview procedures, explanation of the audio-recordings, and transcriptions for verification, (b) voluntary nature of the study, (c) risks, (d) benefits of the study, and (d) university contact information who could discuss their rights as participants of the basic qualitative study.

I emphasized that their privacy would be of utmost importance. I stated that no one would have access to his or her personal information. I also informed them that pseudonyms would be used to protect their identities, and that I would not disclose their district or campus location. All notes transcribed in the codebook would remain under lock and key. I would protect all audio recordings by using passwords. I made clear to the

participants that they could decline participation at any time without receiving any consequence.

I conducted each interview through a video conferencing program called Zoom. It provided options not only for the meeting, but also for recording capability. I recorded the interviews with an audio-recorded device that had a built-in universal serial bus (USB) drive to prevent possible loss of data. I stored all of the notes on paper and on a hard drive with password protections. By Zoom and audio additional recording USB, I captured every word from the participants' responses. It was imperative to remain focused on the participants and their responses without trying to take notes simultaneously. Afterwards, I listened attentively to the recordings and transcribed accurately, which was vital to reinforce further what I had heard during the interview. The goal was to capture their answers in detail to gain a thorough understanding of the data that I was collecting. Throughout the process, I designed the questioning to keep the focus on the problem so that data would be consistent for all of the participants.

At the completion of the interview, I downloaded the audio file onto the laptop using the USB drive audio recorder. I placed each recording onto a file folder under the interviewee's pseudonym using a protected password on a laptop. The transcribing of the file began soon after each interview as I listened to each recorded session. After reading the transcripts, I used the codebook to transfer the transcriptions and to explore for meaning. I saved all of the transcripts using a protected password. The file contained more than 40 pages of transcribed generated data from the recorded, video Zoom interviews and audio recordings. I completed all of the transcriptions by August 31, 2020.

Data Analysis

I collected the basic qualitative study data through video recordings and audiotaped interviews. I transcribed all of the recordings soon after the interviews. I used no software in processing the data. The data that I used went through three cycles of coding to enhance the analysis of the research data. After the first two cycles of coding, I established the thematic analysis. Saldana (2016) noted the importance of analyzing the data and assigning a word or short phrases to identify common thematic themes. Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules (2017) defined thematic analysis as using the process of identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and recording out themes.

First Cycle

After the interviews, I transferred all of the audio recordings to a personal laptop computer and uploaded them to a file under pseudonyms to mask the identity of the 10 participants. I reviewed each transcript for accuracy before emailing it to the participants for approval. I gave the participants instructions to make deletions or additions for clarifications. As soon as the participants reviewed it, they emailed their transcriptions with an email stating their approval of the information.

Upon receipt of the transcriptions, I transferred under pseudonyms with a priori column, coding column, and theme column the participants' data onto a spreadsheet with research questions. With all of the participants, I repeated the process to capture all of their responses. I took many handwritten notes throughout the process to gain insight and I noted them in the codebook using Microsoft Word. I then color-coded the codebook according to the reoccurrence of words (called open coding). In the course of the first

stage of coding, the first cycle of coding yielded key concepts across all the listed transcripts from the 10 principals. Some of the codes had conceptual similarities and appeared with all of the participants. Table 3 shows the descriptive codes for the study.

Table 3

Descriptive Codes

Interview question	Descriptive code
RQ1	Training, SIOP, English language proficiency assessment system, professional development, goals, resources, acquiring English language, close gaps, programs, staff development, instructional approach, monitor, feedback, focus on language, focus on reading, intervention, data, background expertise, instructional plan, target vocabulary, identify gaps
1	Vision, assessment, professional development, staff meeting, professional learning community (PLC), goals, data walks, objectives, data talks, proficiency test, staff development, training, funding, benchmarks, mission, goals, assessment needs, vision, stakeholders, resources, strategies, building relationships, key words, motivational force, grade level meetings, longitude trends, week at glance
2	Assessments, staff development, well-crafted lesson, practices and strategies, facilitate, monitor, progress, reinforce strategies, expectations, walkthroughs, checklist, supported, resources, acquiring skills, support staff, allow time to plan, grade level meetings, self-validated, lesson plans, servant leadership, feedback, planning, open door policy, adjust instruction, hard conversations, supported, checklist
3	Relationship, open communications, celebrate teachers, teacher voice, support, assessments, vision, culture, parent meeting, vision and mission, community, coach, build relationship, school culture, belief in leader, celebrate, communicate, feedback, goals, common language, professional development
4	Collaboration, feedback, planning, professional development, district assessments, targeted action plan, PLCs, Parent meetings, department meetings, vocabulary walls, lesson plans, targeting comprehension, relationships, school leaders, uninterrupted time, building capacities, academic binders
5	Transformational leadership, coach, reflective, walkthroughs, planning, motivate, high expectations, leadership styles, supporting, open door policy, encourage, staff input, role model, communication, build capacity, feedback, transparency, the teacher evaluation and support system, confident leader

(table continues)

Interview question	Descriptive code
6	Staff development, training, SIOP, social emotional, differentiation, comprehension, ELPS, cognitive, vocabulary strategies, sheltered instruction, professional development, sheltered instruction, anticipation guides, academic vocabulary, literacy, vision, programs, research strategies, aligned curriculum, chunking weekly, individualized training, instructional leadership, classroom monitoring, delivery of instruction, feedback, assessment, adjust lessons, model lessons, proficiency, mentors, relationship, encourage, social emotional needs
RQ2	Mentors, walkthroughs, collaborate, lesson plans, PLCs, resources, professional development, building capacity
1	PLCs, aligning resources, money, professional development, goals, building capacity, instructional practices, (common base assessments) CBAs, benchmarks, data driven, growth measures, reflection
2	Feedback, instructional rounds, teacher self-reflect, walkthroughs, learning walks, communication, PLCs, ELPS, data, peer observation, engagement
3	Instructional Leader, coaching, trusting, working relationship, culture, assessment, instructional coach, peer observation, resources
4	Technology resources programs, campus data, differentiation, teacher input, money, resources, goals, culture, professional development, supportive, advocate
5	Culture and climate, staff development, influence, communicate ideas, confidence, celebrate, family atmosphere, build relationships, expectations, building trust
6	Instructional practices, visuals, questioning techniques, staff development, PLCs, differentiation, training, support, communication, instructional practices, lesson engagement, SIOP, ELPs, lesson planning, common planning time, feedback, reflective, written curriculum, backward planning, end of year purpose

Second Cycle

As I continued the transcription, similar descriptive words kept recurring. From this stage, the second stage began using the priori codes; in this process, the codes are predetermined prior to collecting the data (Saldaña, 2016). Priori codes direct the coding process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The priori codes that I used were from Hallinger's (2011) framework of leadership. The priori codes were (a) school goals, (b) supervising

and evaluating process, (c) coordinating curriculum (d) high academic expectations, (e) monitoring student progress, (f) professional development, (g) instructional time, and (h) incentives. Not all of the priori codes emerged, but I still included them in the spreadsheet. I placed some of the descriptive codes in more than one priori code labels and categories.

During the second cycle of priori coding, I depicted the categories that emerged in Table 4 according to the descriptive codes that kept recurring with the participants of the study. Throughout this stage, I linked the descriptive codes to the prior codes to create categories. I linked the categories to form themes that I listed under each research question. Collectively recognized themes comprise several categories within the groupings, also leading to minor themes. From this point of reference, I combined these minor themes to form overarching themes under the research questions.

Table 4

Example of the Analysis of a Priori Codes to Categories

A priori codes	Categories
School goals and high expectations	Goals: vision, mission, weekly expectations
Supervising and evaluating process	Evaluating and leadership: walkthroughs, classroom visits, coaching, reflective feedback, instructional rounds, best practices, develop leadership, role model, build leaders, promote leadership roles, collaboration, open communication, servant leadership, transformational leadership, leadership, teacher input, confident, hands on leader, mentoring, high expectations, mentor teachers, visibility, PLCS, instructional approach, transparency

(table continues)

A priori codes	Categories
Monitoring student progress	Accountability: state tests, benchmarks, common formative assessment, proficiency test, attendance, longitude trends, identify gaps, data walls, data tracking, data binders
Professional development	Professional development: trainings, staff development, lead4ward, K-12 summit, data walks, learning walks, peer observation, critical plans, well-crafted lessons, toolbox, instructional strategies, essential questions
Instruction time	Instructional practices: sheltered instruction, SIOP, ELPS, instructional plans, lesson planning, target instruction, back planning, modeling, instructional delivery, target vocabulary, content objectives, language objectives, background experiences, horizontal alignment, aligned curriculum, written curriculum
Incentives	School culture and climate: build relationships, motivate, inspire, development of relationships, acknowledgement, celebrate small gains, incentives, encouraging, social emotional needs, feel valued, build community, common language, positive environment, caring

Discrepant Cases

In this study, it was imperative to address discrepant explanations throughout the analysis phase. In reference to discrepant cases, Yin (2018) defined these as any data that are revealed that could go against the assumptions allowing for the support of the conceptual framework of the research study. During the interview process, I could not reflect any responses in a competing explanation in the study. After further review of the data analysis, no discrepant cases conflicted with the major themes of the research questions.

Results

The findings of this study came from exploring the behaviors and practices principals use to address the instruction of ELLs in their schools regarding closing achievement gaps. My purpose was to explore the principals' roles in the closing of the

achievement gaps of ELLs through practices, behaviors, and processes within their leadership roles. Largely, minor themes emerged according to the categories during the data analysis stage in my research. From the minor themes, I shaped overarching central themes from each of the research questions. Therefore, the overarching themes that materialized for RQ1, “How do principals describe their role in addressing the ELL achievement gap?” were (a) leadership, (b) supervise/evaluate, and (c) culture and climate. The overarching themes that emerged under RQ2, “How do principals describe the practices, processes, and procedures that they use to address improving ELL instruction?” were (a) accountability, (b) professional development, and (c) instructional practices. In the subsequent sections, I describe the themes that materialized.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked, “How do principals describe their roles in addressing the ELL achievement gap?” After a deep analysis of the transcripts and going through the process of different cycles of coding, the following three themes emerged.

Theme 1: Leadership. HSP1, HSP2, and MSP4 shared their leadership in having goals, a vision, and a clear mission in closing the achievement gaps of ELLs during their interviews. The principals stated that it was their responsibility to communicate a clear vision and mission. It should not be something written on a campus plan and ignored; by using various methods of communication, the school’s vision and mission would be learned and applied. They shared different ways of communicating (e.g., using their district’s messenger system and communicating through faculty meetings). All of the principals had a vision of leadership and the duties that it entailed, according to their own

beliefs. They also understood the importance of student success, especially within the ELL population, for this population traditionally scores lower academically than non-ELLs. Although the principals had a vision and a mission, which are critical in leading a campus, the principals knew that barriers existed within the systems and frameworks that addressed implementing high-quality instruction, feedback, assessments, and ongoing staff development.

For instance, HSP1 shed light on having a vision and a mission for the ELL population to have success academically. She noted,

The vision and mission of a principal is the key in her role to ensure that certified teachers placed in ELL classrooms with proper training in addressing the academic and social-emotional needs of the students, through their expectations. He/she needs to provide the appropriate professional development addressing best practices that work well with ELL students. Some examples are Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) strategies, differentiation, and hands-on, vocabulary development, engagement strategies, and rigor to acquire the English language, attain success when assessed, and perform just as well as the regular student.

HSP2 mentioned the importance of data-driven leadership and the development of visions, mission, and goals according to what the data reveals. He also mentioned that, by unfolding the “truth” in what data unveils, as a leader, one is ready to move forward with plans of action in addressing those areas of challenges. He further stated,

I think our role, as principals, is to achieve (the state) proficiencies. I think our role is also to provide the environment, goals, and vision in providing resources, training, for teachers to be successful and celebrating the wins that we do get.

With the goals set forth for the year, he shared his joy with the proficiency results, “We just received our scores, and we reached our goals and made the mark. Our goal was 42%, we were at 43% and met the indicators, and advancing at all levels.”

MSP4 also noted the importance of his role in having a clear mission with the vision of ELLs closing achievement gaps. He noted,

First, identify your ELL kids, go back, look at data, look at ... scores, and identify the gaps, what is the data saying about the student. Once you have identified the gaps, come up with interventions to address the area of needs.

MSP1, MSP2, ESP1, and ESP2 mentioned their role as it pertained to expectations, visibility through monitoring, and providing support, which were critical in attaining their vision, mission, and goals for the campus. MSP1 stated, “I think that as principals, we have to ensure, through monitoring, that education is provided for ELLs. Also, those teachers need to be well equipped and know the students that they are dealing with to close gaps.”

MSP2 highlighted that teachers and administration must be well scripted in understanding the expectations of the accountability system. Domain 3 was a focused area because it stressed the importance of showing progress, thus he mentioned,

As a principal, we oversee everything, and ELLs are our priority because of Domain 3. It is critical that we are communicating with our staff the importance

of being diverse in their instructional approach with our ELL students. We have had a lot of staff development because of domain 3, so that is one thing we are working on in our ELL population.

ESP1 also stated,

I think that as principals, our mission is to ensure that a well-rounded education is provided for ELLs. It is our goal that ELL teachers are well equipped and all knowing that the students they are dealing with to close their academic gaps.

Theme 2: Supervise and evaluate. The principals all stated the importance of their roles in overseeing their staff and in ensuring that all staff is held accountable for the job of educating students. Through their principals' roles, they acknowledge that, although they manage and evaluate their staff on a day-to-day basis, they also understand the importance of building collaboration, opening the line of communication, and providing instructional support.

HSP1 stressed the importance of monitoring; this is an element of the teacher evaluation system. He stated, "In addition, I monitor the implementation of staff development and impact of best practices/strategies through consistent walkthroughs and conferences with teachers and have open communication on best practices based on state requirements." MSP1 mentioned the importance of monitoring through conducting walkthroughs as much as possible to gain insight on the instructional practices with our ELLs. In fact, he explained, "When you conduct walkthroughs, you are involved and take pride in the successes your students attain when you provide support through staff development opportunities in the areas of need." MSP3 and MSP4 both mentioned that

their roles were to provide teacher support with resources, and time to plan through an embedded time schedule.

For instance, ESP4 described in detail how she conducted classroom walkthroughs and the impact it has on the teachers and students:

As a principal, it is crucial that you schedule visiting classrooms as a daily event; this is a nonnegotiable not only for me, but also for my administrative team. Every Sunday, I plan the weekly walkthroughs with rotations where, daily, we meet to discuss the “hits” and “misses” and the plan of action to create personalized professional development every PLC with every staff member on Fridays. We always tie the walkthroughs and professional development to their evaluation tool. Our role is to coach our teachers up and provide reflective feedback so our ELL students will have academic success. Our campus has 80% ELLs, and we have success through design.

One respondent, ESP3 placed a lot of emphasis on the power of collaboration with his teachers. He felt that collaboration with his teachers was an asset, as it will benefit all his students with an emphasis on his ELL population. ESP3 stated,

First, you need to be well read, professionally researched to communicate instructional expectations. As principal, you have to be able to support teachers and collaborate with them based on what you have read and learned to share best practices. Second, involve teachers in book studies and have them collaborate best practices with each other.

Regarding the importance of open communication, HSP2 and ESP3 mentioned that for teachers to follow through with their coaching, provide reflective feedback, and have collaboration, they had to be able to communicate those expectations. HSP2 indicated,

Teachers will step up just by the way you ask and not tell them because I am the principal, it is how you communicate. I have to have a great relationship with my staff and always willing to recognize their accomplishments.

Whereas ESP3 noted, “First, you need to be well-read, well researched.” He then elaborated, he thinks “as principal, you have to be able to support teachers,” and then, he went on to explain, “you have to be able to daily communicate, lesson plans expectations, walkthroughs feedback, and check data constantly and whatever we do, we do in the classroom and it will expose what is being done instructionally.” It was evident that both principals felt adamant about the manner in which the communication affects teacher and student performance depending on their monitoring.

Theme 3: Culture and climate. The culture and climate of a school campus encompasses the effects that a school has on students, staff, and parents. The effect might come through the relationship with all three facets to the ways in which teachers and staff value working together. The campus principals’ collective response was that culture and climate were about building community through celebrations, incentives, and encouragement to having a common language that leads to the educational family coexisting and thriving in student success. A program they all spoke about was Character Strong, in which the focus was on building relationships, communicating, and caring for others. All of the participants established importance and mission to build engagement

with their parents, community members, and staff to engage better in their students' lives. It was clear to them that a partnership should exist between school, home, and community to meet the needs of the "whole" child.

All 10 participants stated that school culture and climate were a vital responsibility of the campus principal. They all voiced the importance of the impact that it has on ELLs when they feel valued and celebrated. For instance, ESP4 mentioned how she felt about ensuring that her campus was welcoming to all who walked through her doors. She perceived a leader to be one who influences people around oneself. This principal captured this belief in her statement:

In the Walk, [the WALK is an area in the front of the school where students are celebrated with a Walk of Fame, where parents and staff view daily], we take action during the week and ask for feedback. Working on Sundays, 5-7 hours just planning. I provide documents, always communicating the positive. I implement a lot of acknowledgement, recognition, and celebration time. Building teachers' billboards and supporting their careers and goals. We love to celebrate teachers' and the students' performances and growth every 6 weeks. We provide breakfast, bashes, field trips, and awards assemblies; cater lunch, a free pass to the campus game room, breakfast at IHOP, etc. We also make sure our parents feel welcomed and celebrated as well through various activities during the evening.

HSP1 defined encompassing leadership in numerous lenses. Her statement was geared to developing positive relationships with her staff. According to her, she suggested building

support systems and paying attention to the culture of the school and the community. She voiced that,

When culture and climate is in place are in place, it becomes easier to work through curriculum instruction or assessment issues that the teacher may be facing. Any teacher working with the ELL population has added stress placed on her plate. When the principal plays a supportive and understanding role and provides the necessary tools to ensure student success, teachers will in turn take the principal's recommendations and make adjustments to improve teaching and student learning.

Parental involvement is another key component in school culture and climate. MSP1 mentioned, "We started parental involvement three years ago. We were able to get parents involved by having evenings when they come to meet with teachers, visit classrooms, and review the Test reports." All of the principals felt that ELLs needed to feel valued for who they are; this fueled the importance of providing staff developments in which diversity is celebrated. ESP3 noted, "School culture celebrates diversity, visual ups all over school, communicate both in English and Spanish, and students feel at ease with teachers who can communicate in their home language."

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked, "How do principals describe the practices, processes, and procedures that they use to address improving ELL instruction?" Once I continued appraising and conducting a deep analysis of the transcripts and I continued to go through

the process of different cycles of coding, the following are three themes materialized for Research Question 2.

Theme 1: Accountability. Under this theme, all principals placed value on assessing students throughout the year. What they stated was that student outcomes should be developed from data to make informed decisions (Young, McNamara, Brown, & O'Hara, 2018). Hence, principals emphasized the importance of monitoring through common assessments and benchmarks. According to Young et al. (2018), principals collect and analyze data to inform their decisions on their campuses to implement processes and procedures. Principals similarly placed value on the importance of proficiency checks to keep track of ELLs' speaking, listening, writing, and reading areas. The state standardized requirements include all of these critical skills.

HSP1 placed a lot of emphasis on the benefit of providing the ELLs with many opportunities to reach their potential via proficiency practices in the classroom setting. She mentioned the importance of making it a daily occurrence as it offers ELLs daily practices and routines to attain better the English language. She clarified:

I know the importance of ensuring that teachers are applying the SIOP strategies in the classrooms daily while unpacking standards to teach at various levels that will be tested.... We as principals should establish procedures and protocols such as three weeks' data talks to help determine if ELL students are on track to reach English proficiency and have success in their assessments that are required of them.

MSP2 stated that he asks his staff view the data and to look at the root causes. According to him, once they are able to identify high needs areas, then they proceed in developing plans of actions. He explained:

Therefore, after each assessment, a CBA or benchmark, we do a root cause analysis, breakdown of the question, and the percentages. We breakdown specific items and look at the overall picture. Usually one area hurts everybody across the board, so we go back, or reteach. If there is a teacher scoring well, we have her or him share successful approaches on how to assist students with gaps. We break down data and look at the root cause analysis and revisit. What we need to do, it to keep keen focus on our ELL population.

ESP1, ESP2, ESP3 all mentioned the importance of the state exam and how it guides what teachers need to support via the classroom setting. They also stated that ELLs need various opportunities to practice online to keep the focus on data points, strategies, and target growth measures. Once the growth and target measures are established, they work on strategies to close those gaps.

ESP4 explained how her staff looks at different data points and other data such as discipline referrals, attendance, progress reports, and 6 weeks' grades. She further stated that her staff was well scripted in the expectations of the exams. She mentioned the following:

We look at the data first and analyze what it is stating. In addition, we break data by skills to global concepts. We look at what teachers use, we look at longitude data, as well as looking at trends. Teachers reflect and study cohort differences

and what resources are used. Teachers understand what data means, and they look at domains, for instance, Domain 2 looks at growth. Building up the academic common language to achieve master's level. We also study what TEKS are being assessed. Being data-driven is all about breaking down data, data comparisons, and data reflection to close achievement gaps.

Theme 2: Professional development. Professional development was extremely important to all of the principals. They stated that, for students to show growth and to improve, principals had to provide ongoing training for teachers to hone their craft. They stressed the importance of having learning walks, during which teachers were able to participate in peer observations to share best practices. Another important element of professional development was to ensure that teachers had time to model what they learned through ongoing staff development in meeting the needs of ELLs. One great example of training was the importance of content and language objectives to ELLs. They also raved about the K-12 Summit program that allowed the ELL population to practice speaking, listening, reading comprehension, and writing through daily lessons. In addition, it allowed for practice testing that modeled the test. The test is a rigorous assessment that was used to determine the ELLs' progress. Many of the programs that they spoke about were "tools in their toolbox" as per ESP1 statement. According to MSP2, "Language acquisition, SIOP model training, ELLs training, content and language objective are all areas which need much support. He further explained, "The lesson planning has all components of sheltered instruction." He stated, "To close achievement

gaps of ELLs is to provide teachers with support through intentional staff development that would impact ELLs instructionally.”

ESP4 mentioned that her ELLs had great success on her campus because her focus was ensuring they had an equitable education, while providing the tools the teachers through intentional training. On her watch, she disclosed that her staff receives weekly professional development from her depending on the results that her administration team finds as they conduct classroom walkthroughs weekly. According to her, her emphasis is developing her teachers in the delivery of instruction and ensuring rigor in the lessons. She described the following.

The curriculum from beginning to end is crucial. My role is to provide whatever tools teachers need to have the right professional development. I need to know what grade levels offer and whether the teachers have a thorough understanding of the curriculum. Curriculum is essential because of and how they tie together the instruction. I have processes and walks her teachers to what they need understand and assessed. I expect teachers to put together their own unique lesson that meets the needs of ELL students. In addition, backward planning is a professional development practice that I myself trained them on.

The participants emphasized the importance of targeted professional development to close achievement gaps. In fact, Miessel, Parr, and Timperley (2016) found that laser-focused staff development programs developed according to the needs of the campus was important in promoting student growth. HSP2 mentioned, “Everybody knows the game about becoming an A+ school with ensuring aligned targeted professional development

on sheltered instruction.” MSP1 stated, “My job as the campus principal is to plan for targeted training based on data so that strategies that are researched based are implemented to show growth on ... testing.” MSP3 further stated, “All the professional development in the world is fine, but to have real impact, we as principals, need to monitor the implementation of effective practices.” The other principals of the study spoke about implementing strategic instructional protocols that called for feedback about teachers’ instructional practices.

Theme 3: Instructional practices. The principals in the study all agreed that teachers must be lifelong learners in their craft to remain current in the classroom with their instructional practices. Principals all agreed that peer observation, in which teachers visit classrooms of teachers who are experts in their field was useful (Girvan, Conneely, & Tangrey, 2016). The result of this practice provides exposure to teachers in learning how to reflect and improve their teaching practices (Girvan et al., 2016). According to Bigsby and Firestone (2017), they found that effective professional development is focused on content where teachers make connections so that it equates to improve teaching instructional practices.

In this study, according to the participants, instructional practices were centered on sheltered instruction, lesson planning, target interventions, aligned curriculum, and how they translated these components to instructional delivery. MSP3 stated, “The delivery of instruction with a great lesson is about the instructional practices teachers are able to deliver based on targeted standards, developed during the planning of the lesson.”

ESP4 explained that she expects her teachers to participate in peer observations as a means of improving their instructional practices in their classrooms to close the achievement gaps of ELLs. She stated:

Throughout walkthroughs, I provide reflective feedback with my teachers. When I observe an area in which teachers need improvement, I address it right away. The next step I take is provide resources; have them watch a video, read a book to improve the instructional practices. Another process that I follow through with is teachers engaged in peer observations with a strong teacher. From there, I have them plan lessons with the department head to address areas of challenges. What I have found is that teachers improve dramatically. This is demonstrated through the data from assessments.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), the researcher must establish credibility by using two validation strategies to make certain accuracy of the data. According to Nowell et al. (2017), the researcher's findings are well intentioned in establishing trustworthiness. For this to occur, I collected data and recorded it through semistructured interviews via Zoom. I used an additional recorder as a backup measure. After completing the interviews, I connected the recorder to the laptop to download the interview. Then, I transferred the transcriptions of the interviews onto the Microsoft spreadsheet, a codebook in which I recorded data from the reflections, answers, and questions. I analyzed the data by highlighting descriptive codes and field notes to support

the themes that emerged. Upon completing the transcribing, I emailed the transcripts to the participants for member checking to establish credibility. I asked the participants to review and confirm the accuracy of the transcripts via email. In fact, all of the participants sent confirmation that the information transcribed was accurate.

Dependability

According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), dependability in qualitative research is the manner in which the researcher collects and explains the data; the methods chosen are appropriate in answering the research questions. As the interview process and protocols were developed, I vetted the method with my trusted chair for feedback to examine the process and findings, and to ensure that I had aligned the data. Through this step, I made much-needed adjustments to the questions to ensure that the questions posed would answer the research questions. Through the analysis process, I recorded the steps of the data collection through color-coding and creating columns in the codebook. The codebook served for recording reflections, journal entries, field notes, and transcripts. Through the three-step process in coding, increased dependability of the data occurred before, during, and after the analysis process. Finally, I reviewed all of the data numerous times to ensure alignment with the study. Soon after, I provided each participant the opportunity to review the transcripts for accuracy and to offer recommendations through revisions or necessary edits.

Transferability

According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), transferability infers that the conclusions can be generalized by conveying interpretations in the findings of the study without

compromising the participant's experiences. Ravitch and Carl (2016) also said that the applicability of a study broadens the contexts of a research study as transferability.

Throughout the research process, I included rich descriptions of the findings to add relevance where I would apply it to other contexts for transferability. For this study, the participants encompassed a wide range of experiences at all grade levels.

Confirmability

Through continuous reflection and notetaking, I established confirmability in the research study. Accordingly, personal bias, from personal experiences from my service as a campus principal at all three levels to being a current superintendent of schools, did not occur in this study. After each interview, I took notes on the similarities of the participants' responses. However, remaining steadfast and laser-focused was the goal in working on the purpose of the study. At no point did personal experiences impede the data collection and analysis process.

In this research study, the findings were valid and reliable to guarantee trustworthiness. To attain trustworthiness, it was critical to embark on careful and thorough planning. This involved explaining the phases through each step by addressing credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. The role of researcher is to follow the data process and data. It was essential to be mindful of personal bias; this at no point influenced the results of the data collected for this research study.

Summary

The problem is the gap in practice, which is related to how principals use instructional leadership practices and behaviors while trying to address the ELL academic

achievement gaps. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the behaviors and practices that principals use to address the instruction of ELLs in their schools. The results of this study might fill a gap in knowledge to plan better how to address the issue through a better understanding of a specific practice or practice. The research could help develop a plan to close the achievement gap of ELLs. The 10 participating principals shared their leadership instructional practices that they used to influence closing the gaps of ELLs on their respective campus. All of the principals believed in creating a vision and a mission, and in having high expectations for their staff and students. They all felt that, for the vision to become a success, set practices, processes, and procedures for the vision must become a reality. They believe that principals must be servant leaders who create a positive school culture and climate. Building relationships with staff, students, and parents was also an important component in closing the achievement gaps of ELLs.

All of the principals emphasized the importance of accountability through formative assessments and common assessments. Soon after the assessments, the principals and teachers began data dives to make decisions to address student progress. The teachers requested opportunities for further professional development according with research best practices. These instructional strategies, when implemented with fidelity and monitored daily, have great impact on closing achievement gaps of ELLs. The principals also placed emphasis on evaluating teachers through classroom visits and instructional walkthroughs during which they had the opportunity to afford teachers with reflective feedback and coaching. These areas are linked to the teacher evaluation system. All of the participants expressed their beliefs that they could close the achievement gaps

of ELLs by being servant leaders. As the campus instructional leaders, principals placed great emphasis on being data-driven, and by providing meaningful professional development. As a consensus, they took pride in allowing PLCs during the instructional day. They also felt that it was imperative to have teacher input. The campus principals also placed importance on conducting daily classroom walkthroughs. The principals all mentioned that creating positive school culture and climate was imperative for a sense of belonging and support. They added the importance of parental involvement and attaining a common goal in reference to student achievement. To conclude this study and after further analysis of the data, progress did occur. Yet, it was not significant enough to close the achievement gaps of ELLs. All principals remained optimistic in their leadership roles; they believed that their practices would increase ELL academic achievement and close the gaps. The themes that emerged allowed me to answer the two research questions:

RQ1: How do principals describe their role in addressing the ELL achievement gap?

RQ2: How do principals describe the practices, processes, and procedures that they use to address improving ELL instruction?

The goal of all the participants was to improve teacher effectiveness to close the academic achievement gaps of their ELL population on their campus. In Chapter 4, I presented the results of the study. In chapter 5, I will discuss the interpretation of the research findings, limitations, recommendations, implications, and conclusions.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the behavior and practices that principals use to address the instruction of ELLs in their schools. I investigated the instructional supports, behaviors, and practices that the 10 participants use to close the achievement gaps of ELLs under their leadership. The qualitative design allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences through semistructured, face-to-face, virtual Zoom interviews (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

This study was relevant because limited research existed on principals' behaviors and practices related to closing the achievement gaps of ELLs. The purpose of this study was to fill the gap in practice found in the literature in reference to ELL achievement gaps. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the results and interpretations of the findings. I drew the research questions that guided the study from Hallinger's (2011) instructional leadership framework:

RQ1: How do principals describe their roles in addressing the ELL achievement gap?

RQ2: How do principals describe the practices, processes, and procedures that they use to address improving ELL instruction?

The participants shared their perspectives about their roles as instructional leaders. I asked the participants questions pertaining to their roles in closing achievement gaps of ELLs. The rationale behind the research was to comprehend how campus principals provide leadership about the instructional practices of ELLs. One of the key findings was the attentiveness of principals in providing their teachers with resources,

programs, professional development, and strategies supporting the academic achievement of ELL students. Other key findings about principal's roles were that they provided additional time for lesson planning, data talks and walks, PLC time, and parental involvement through activities. Additional findings were the importance of principals monitoring students and teachers and providing instructional support. The teachers' attention was focused on providing coaching, reflective feedback, and increased peer observation time. The primary administrative challenge was providing innovative practices in sheltered instruction for the ELL population beyond the practices employed now. Chapter 5 includes the interpretation of the findings, study limitations, recommendations, implications, and conclusions.

Interpretation of the Findings

I determined my interpretation of the findings for this basic qualitative study by the conceptual framework and the literature review. Hallinger (2011) focused the model on instructional management by examining instructional leadership. Hallinger's framework of instructional leadership encompasses (a) school goals, (b) supervising and evaluating process, (c) coordinating curriculum, (d) high academic expectations, (e) monitoring student progress, (f) professional development, (g) instructional time, and (h) incentives. Not all of the a priori codes emerged, but they were still included in the spreadsheet. According to Hallinger's model, the mission and goals are fundamental for effective instructional leadership. Hallinger also emphasized managing instructional programs and monitoring the progress of students as the principal's roles in promoting

quality instruction. I developed the research questions in the current study to explore the principal's role in closing the gaps of ELLs.

Leadership

The theme of leadership recurred throughout the analysis process. The probe revealed the importance and value of being an effective servant and transformational leader. A culturally responsive leader was also important to communicate a vision, mission, and goals of academic success (see Bush, 2018; Makgato & Mudzanani, 2019; Ninković & Knežević, 2018). Another important component of being a leader on campus was the value of communicating the vision and mission with the support of parents and the community. Fostering partnerships with the community created an educational family; these partnerships had an impact on ELL students' academic achievements. Principals reported that including family and community in school activities supported the students' academic achievements. Creating a culture of open lines of communication with parents leads to the success of the vision and mission of the campus (Hollingworth et al., 2018). In designing a school that meets the needs of all students, principals have influence in creating a culture of high expectations (McKinney et al., 2015; Munguia, 2017). Being a culturally responsive leader comes with the added responsibility of promoting inclusive practices in one's school and building connections with staff and students. When leadership creates a school culture of belonging through care, trust, motivation, collaboration, and mutual respect, that culture leads to student achievement (Smith & Amushigamo, 2016). Strong leadership was a prominent finding of the current study.

Development of Teacher Efficacy

The principals placed great emphasis on the importance of teacher development and support in fostering academic achievement for all students with an emphasis on the ELL population. According to Boylan (2016), positive change is determined by the level of training and support that principals and other academic leaders provide for ELLs or teachers within the school system. Salem (2016) studied principals' actions and collaborations with teachers and found a direct correlation between principal/teacher interactions, academic success, and closing the achievement gap. In the current study, the principals mentioned that it was critical to ensure that teachers followed a high-quality scope and sequence curriculum with collaborative lesson planning. The principals noted the importance of providing teachers with extra time to plan lessons. With additional time, the teachers worked as a unified team to develop well-crafted lessons with differentiated instructional practices. The principals explained that teachers should be provided with professional development, program-specific training, and ongoing peer observation practices. The principals also emphasized the importance of providing teachers with sheltered instructional training for their ELL population in which the focus was on speaking, listening, writing, and reading comprehension skills. According to the principals, these instructional practices, with an emphasis on English language proficiency, helped ELL students to be successful academically with state and federal mandated state tests exams.

Accountability

All of the participants stressed the importance of data analysis at their campuses. The principals used various methods of analyzing data and pointed out specific data points. Some data that they disaggregated were students' testing results that the district had attained from prior-year state assessments. The principals emphasized the use of common assessments that were administered weekly and every 3 weeks. With each assessment result, the campus leaders and teachers prioritized areas of challenges and created intervention strategies, including after-school tutoring, Saturday academies, and intervention time within the schedule day. The principals also stated that they allowed PLC time during the day to allow teachers the time for data talks and to share targeted instructional practices. For the ELL population, intervention time meant homing in on the content objectives, language objectives, and academic vocabulary for tested areas. The principals reported that setting expectations through data was extremely important. Finally, the principals noted the importance of understanding the accountability system and its effect on teacher instructional practices to close achievement gaps of ELLs.

Instructional Supports

The principals highlighted the importance of monitoring instructional practices through classroom visits. Fifty percent of the principals stated that they conducted walk-throughs daily and provided feedback to teachers within 24 hours. The principals also stated that it was important to provide reflective feedback to teachers within a day or not more than a week after the observation. The principals mentioned that their teachers looked forward to receiving reflective feedback on what the principals had monitored and

observed. According to Choy et al. (2019), reflective feedback is a vital practice that teachers employ to influence student learning and to implement changes in instructional practices and teaching experiences. To influence academic achievement, the principals must lead through best practices to provide teachers with instructional coaching and direction essential for displaying the best practices to close ELLs' achievement gaps. School principals hold noteworthy positions in education; therefore, they must be effective instructional leaders to guarantee student academic success in the classroom through instructional coaching. According to Bettini et al. (2019), principals are leaders whose prime charge is to support their teachers instructionally. The principals in the current study noted the importance of the teacher evaluation system. This system is used to provide feedback to teachers in guiding their professional growth and development.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this research was the number of participants. I tried to obtain 15 participants, yet only 10 agreed to be part of the study. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), having a smaller sample size allows the researcher to dive deeper into the research problem. What I achieved through data saturation was the common responses from each participant; I recorded all of these responses in the codebook. Another limitation was having only two high school principals in contrast to four middle and elementary school principals. The limited sample size might have been a challenge for transferability. One additional limitation was the United States-Mexico border study site; schools in other geographical areas might not have the same number of ELLs on their campuses. I did not compromise the trustworthiness of the research. I had no professional

relationships with the participants; therefore, there was minimal risk of conflict of interest. Through the research process, interview transcripts were securely stored to ensure confidentiality.

Recommendations

When I began the research on principals' behaviors and practices related to closing the achievement gap for ELL students, I was not able to find current research. Nevertheless, academic gaps exist in schools; therefore, equipping schools with effective instructional leaders is crucial. Nevertheless, I did find perceptions and beliefs regarding principal leadership styles. In the study, I focused on exploring principals' roles in closing the achievement gaps through their practices, processes, and procedures in schools that are in close proximity to the United States-Mexico border. Abdallah and Forawi (2017) noted that principals are the most influential factor in schools. Principals need to evolve as effective instructional leaders through programs, protocols, and concrete actions to become engaged in instructional tasks (Abdallah & Forawi, 2017).

At the completion of my study, I realized that I must conduct further research on successful principals who have closed achievement gaps, regardless of the percentages of ELLs and the location. Therefore, I recommend that a follow-up study be conducted on specific grade levels with principals and assistant principals to explore how the administration team leads with the same expectations, vision, and common language pertaining to their roles as instructional leaders. In the current study, I found that not all of the principals spoke the same language in reference to the best practices evaluated on their campuses. Monitoring teacher effectiveness is a vital role for most principals. The

principals showed similarities regarding promoting teacher effectiveness with specific initiatives and learning opportunities. In fact, the teachers stated that their principals provided examples of what they do for planning, staff development, peer observations, and programs. However, when the principals spoke about the importance of walk-throughs, classroom visits, and meetings, no clear follow-up time was provided for feedback and coaching to build teacher capacity. Therefore, I recommend that more studies be conducted to provide insight into the follow-up strategies that will increase teacher instructional practices. These new studies will further help to close ELLs' achievement gaps.

I also recommend that school district administrators conduct preparation programs to allow campus administrators to become well versed in the instructional practices and processes that are systemic in all grade levels with the implementation of sheltered instruction. A principal's role as a leader encompasses many areas, including the vital role of management. However, the focus must be on instruction, for it will have lasting effects on instructional practices.

Implications

The implications of the researchers' results, in relation to positive social change, are relevant to principals as practitioners to develop practices, processes, and procedures for improvements in ELL academic achievement. As our world becomes a global community, closing the gaps of ELLs will nurture positive social change through elevating their skill base so that they can become competitive members of any community. Being able to compete for jobs will enhance their personal lives.

Therefore, it is in the best interest of the educational community to improve principals' instructional leadership capacities to improve ELL teachers' effectiveness to close the academic gaps of ELLs. According to Goddard, Skrla, and Salloum, (2018), the campus principals' instructional leadership practices have a major impact on the overall effectiveness of student groups who lag behind in achievement. Teachers of ELLs might improve their craft in teaching and learning with guidance from principals who are well versed in sheltered instructional strategies and ELL programs. The findings of my research support the need for more studies in processes, practices, and procedures that the principals emphasized in from the study to support the academic achievement of ELLs. My research results showed six common themes on principals' practices, processes, and procedures in closing the achievement gaps of ELLs: (a) leadership having clear vision, mission, and goals; (b) supervising and evaluating teachers with reflective feedback and coaching opportunities; (c) creating a culture and climate of positiveness and appreciation of staff; (d) making all members of the educational family accountable with an emphasis on data-driven decisions; (e) placing professional development at the forefront, and (f) making instructional practices research-based and monitoring through classroom visits. The ultimate goal of leadership practices is to improve student performance for all students.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the behaviors and practices principals used to address the instruction of ELLs in their schools. After conducting the interviews with the principals who came from elementary, middle, and high schools, I

gleaned an understanding into the various leadership practices in relation to closing the achievement gaps of ELLs. School principals are influential in the development of the quality of a school and are key factors in student success. Principals are held accountable in creating and maintaining a school environment that supports the academic achievement and improvement of the students whom they serve (Terosky, 2016). The principals in this study agreed that their roles as instructional leaders gave them the responsibility to set clear visions, missions, and goals for their campus.

The themes that remained constant were positive school culture, on-going professional development, monitoring, and instructional practices that closed the achievement gaps of ELLs. The need to provide teachers with coaching and reflective feedback resonated with all the principals. It was also evident that a couple of the principals placed most of the responsibility of ELL teachers and students on their assistant principals, consultants, or district-level administrators. Padron and Waxman (2016) noted that some principals had little or no knowledge about ELL populations and would not be able to provide support instructionally. Since the inception of the reauthorization of ESSA (2015), teachers have been acknowledged as the most important component in student learning and growth in student achievement. The research study on principals' roles through their practices and behaviors in closing achievement gaps of ELLs could benefit in bridging the efforts to develop further school principals' skills. Increasing their preparedness in instructional leadership and their continued professional development might promote an increase in effective leadership practices.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the behavior and practices that principals use to address the instruction of ELLs in their schools. I investigated the instructional supports that the 10 participants used, regarding their behaviors and practices, to close the achievement gaps of ELLs under their leadership. The qualitative design allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences through semistructured, face-to-face, virtual Zoom interviews (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

This study was relevant because limited research existed on principals' behaviors and practices that relate to closing the achievement gaps of ELLs. The purpose of this study was to fill the gap in practice found in the literature in reference to ELL achievement gaps. The participants shared their beliefs and perspectives about their roles as instructional leaders. I asked the participants of the study questions pertaining to their roles in closing achievement gaps of ELLs. The rationale behind the research was to comprehend how campus principals provide leadership regarding the instructional practices of ELLs. One of the key findings was the attentiveness of principals in providing teachers with resources, programs, professional development, and strategies so that they could support the academic achievement of their ELL students. Other key findings revolved around providing additional time for lesson planning, data talks and walks, PLC time, and involving parents through activities. Additional key findings were the importance of principals monitoring both students and teachers and providing additional support in instructional practices. According to the teachers, the principals' assistance was centered on providing coaching, reflective feedback, and an increase in peer observation time. In reference to ELL students, the assistance was about closely

monitoring through data points to provide strategic interventions for ELLs and other students with academic gaps as per formative assessments. The primary challenge is in providing innovative practices in sheltered instruction for all of the ELL population beyond the practices that they employ now.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Date:_____ Start Time:_____ End Time:_____

Interviewee Pseudonym: _____

Male ____ Female ____

Introduction

Thank you for taking time to participate in my study. I am interested in attaining knowledge about the behaviors and practices principals use to address the instruction of ELLs in their school. Please speak freely and openly and state your honest opinions to the questions being asked.

This confidential interview will be audio recorded as stated in the interview consent form. You will be given a pseudonym to ensure that your personal information and identity remain confidential. Do you have any questions before we proceed?

Main Questions

RQ1. How do principals describe their role in addressing the ELL achievement gap?

A. How do you communicate your vision and mission in closing the gaps of ELLs?

Please elaborate.

B. What is your role in influencing and providing support to teachers with English Language Learners? How is this communicated and monitored?

C. What actions through positive school culture do you believe are necessary to support teachers with English language learners? Please elaborate.

D. How do you best collaborate with teachers of English language learners? Please elaborate.

- E. Describe what your leadership style should be in relation to supporting teachers who work with English language Learners and why.
 - F. Describe the type of professional development you believe is essential for you to supply teachers with English language Learners and why.
- RQ2. How do principals describe the practices, processes, and procedures that they use to address improving ELL instruction?
- A. How do you align instructional practices based on data?
 - B. Describe your role in providing reflective feedback as a means of supporting teachers of English language learners.
 - C. Describe your role in providing instructional coaching that is essential to support teachers with English language learners through visibility in classrooms.
 - D. Describe your role in providing instructional resources to teachers with English language learners and why.
 - E. Describe your role in supporting culturally sensitive environments and how you accomplish that.
 - F. What types of instructional practices and processes are essential for you to supply to teachers to support them in working with English language learners? Please elaborate.

Concluding Remarks

First of all, thank you for taking the time for the interview and answering the questions. Your experiences will help me further understand study the behaviors and

practices principals use to address the instruction of ELLs in their schools. My hope is that the information will assist in improving and sustaining practices toward student achievement for all students, including ELLs. As a participant for this study, you will have an opportunity to review the preliminary findings to ensure information is conveyed accurately.